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Conference on Jewish Material Claims
Against Germany

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The Stories of:

Eric Haas
born: July 3, 1917
Offenbach/M, Germany

and

Marga Schlamm Haas
born: February 5, 1921
Berlin, Germany

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Eric

All the incidents are true and took place the way they did. They are not in chronological order, I put them in context. Not all the happenings are grim, there are quite a few funny stories. I list them to make this report more personal.

I learned to live with anti-semitism early on. At 10 years old I entered high school. The school system in Germany is different. And from then on I had to live with daily name calling, nasty remarks and physical and mental abuse. Upon my parents insistence, I walked away from all this. One of my classmates was especially vicious. He taunted me until I lost control. I beat him unconscious in the street in front of the school. Somebody that knew me told my parents. I got a good dressing down from them but I think they were proud of me anyway.

During the elections of 1933, the "Social Democrats" who were in power, ran a poor and negative campaign. But the Nazis were very aggressive. The fear of communism was strong. When Hitler, with all of his rhetoric, won, my parents did not see a future for me in Germany and took me out of high school. A trade school in Offenbach offered a one year accelerated business course, so, I was enrolled there.

The school year in Germany starts at Easter. Just about when Hitler came to power. It was 1933. In the beginning things went smoothly but we had to work really hard to keep up with the accelerated curriculum. The class was co-educational and I enjoyed it. In high school we were strictly separated by boys and other high schools were for girls only. We had once a month what we would call a commerce, a beer party, at a local pub. This was a long standing tradition at this school. After a few months I no longer felt welcome. One after another my classmates arrived at school in Nazi uniforms. Pretty soon we started military training, marching, obstacle running, hand grenade throwing and so forth. By the way, the German hand grenade were not the pineapple type used in this country but rather tin cans with a wooden handle. They are very hard to aim with since they tumble. I always had the best grade in class in hand grenade throwing, and was mighty proud of myself.

Then a new principle arrived. One of his first official acts was to advise everybody that he was a staunch supporter of Hitler. Any act of sabotage or any remark against Hitler or the party would be immediately punished by sending the culprit to a concentration camp, which at the time was more or less a re-education detention center.

When I came home that night, I told my mother what he had told us. Thinking it was funny, I added that if I failed to come home from school one day she would know where to look for me. She became very upset by all this especially since my father was in Sweden at the time selling the handbags he manufactured. The government subsidized him in that because they wanted and needed the foreign exchange. Before he ever got started in Sweden he used to export to England, but when the English pound was devalued, he lost heavily.

I had befriended a boy about my age by the name of Paul Levy. He had a tremendous nose. He would have put Klinger, on M*A*S*H to shame. He lived in another part of town, and went to a different school. But every afternoon we did homework together and played at his house because it was in a more central location. One late afternoon, on my way home, we stood in front of his door and talked when a troop of "SA" marched by. They are also known as "brown shirts." They stopped and asked us our names. The leader of the group turned to me and asked me if I was the Eric Haas that lived at "such and such" address. When I said yes, they arrested me and marched me off. It turned out that this guy used to live in the same building with us but had to move out because he could not hang on to a job and could not pay his rent. Now he was going to show me how big a "man" he really was. Paul ran in and told his mother who immediately called my mother and told her what had happened. She called the police to ask for help but got nowhere.

I was marched down to the river, where I was given a bucket of black paint, and a brush and had to paint over communist slogans that had been painted on a long fence around the harbor. I was kicked, pummeled, and verbally abused. After I had finished the fence, which took a good couple of hours, I was loaded onto a small rowboat, and with two guards rowed to the bridge over the river and with a steel brush, erased more slogans. Somebody who knew me saw me painting the fence but until my mother and uncle, who lived in Offenbach got there, I was already under the bridge. When it was too dark to see, I was let go and strolled home.

When I got home, I found a whole host assembled, my uncle, the cantor the rabbi, the temple board, neighbors, etc. I did not know that my mother knew what had happened. I did not know that Paul's mother had called nor that people had seen me at the fence, and on the water. When someone had called that they had seen me in a rowboat the worst was expected. A few days before this incident they had thrown a Jewish man into the river, and prevented him from climbing out. He swam back and forth until tired out and drowned. I

was sorry that I had told my mother about the principal's remark, she was so glad to see me alive, that all was forgiven.

In the middle of the school year, we moved to Frankfurt. Father had heavy loses when the Swedish Krona was devalued and had to close his factory. Our family owned a large company in Frankfurt. Father became the auditor after the man, who held the job, emigrated. We lived within walking distance of the Frankfurt railroad station. And the school I attended was a few blocks from the railroad station in Offenbach. In bad weather I took the train to school and in nice weather I rode the 6 miles on my bike. After graduating, I also joined our "firm" and was trained to be a mechanic. The "firm" was a rather large wholesale house of bicycles, motorcycles and all the parts. It was founded in 1900 by my grandfather, Herman Manko.

Holland moved on bicycles. In fact there were 1 1/2 bicycles for every Dutch man, women and child. That was perfect for the kind of business we were in and we exported large amounts of goods to Holland. It was against the law to take money out of Germany, but by manipulating prices, we were able to get enough money into Holland to start a good sized bicycle store. It was ably run by a Jewish immigrant to Holland and was at a good location in Amsterdam.

After I had finished my year apprenticeship, my father took me to Amsterdam, Holland. This was March 1935. I was 17 1/2 years old. I was placed in a boarding house that had been recommended and started work at the store as a mechanic. There were 5 or 6 other boarders besides the landlady who was widowed and had a 17 year old daughter. This made it easy for me to learn the Dutch language and all the other things a young boy of 17 or 18 needs to know.

When I entered Holland, there were no restrictions on either working or living in Holland. But as the trickle of immigrants became a stream, the boarders were closed. Who was in the country could stay but you had to show a means of support. Soon they required all foreigners to have a work permit to hold a job. Since they issued precious few, and I could not get one, I had to start a second store and I ran it until the Germans took it away from me in 1942.

In 1939 my German passport expired. I went to the consulate where they told me to come back a week later. When I returned they told me that my parents, who had left Germany in the meantime, did not pay all of their required "Jew" taxes, and unless I paid up, I could not have my passport back. If I recall correctly, they wanted 7000 guilders. I did not have that much money, and even if I had I would not have given it to them. So, I told them where to stick their

passport. Subsequently, I received an ID from the Dutch. Not long after that, the Germans took Holland. I had a few uneasy weeks because of this incident but nothing ever came of it. More on my parents emigration later.

On May 10, 1940, the Germans invaded Holland. The Dutch had flooded the lowlands to keep the Germans out so they landed parachute troops behind the Dutch lines, and since France and Belgium did not offer much resistance, they entered Holland through Belgium. They also bombed Rotterdam, and promised to do the same to Amsterdam so the Dutch surrendered.

After Germany invaded France two times, in 1870 and 1914, the French built a heavily reinforced and well staffed defensive line along their common border: THE MAGINOT LINE. Holland and Belgium had stayed out of WWI, so my parents believed I would be safe. But since Germany could not pierce the Maginot Line without great losses, they went into France through Holland and Belgium.

I do not have the eloquence to describe to you my feelings as I saw the German troops enter Amsterdam. The lump in my throat was enormous. I had seen German dive bombers in action around Amsterdam but that did not prepare me for what I felt then. The troops that occupied Amsterdam were old men. Some were on bicycles with their rifles slung over their backs, some were sitting in horse drawn farm wagons. The column was several miles long and moved very slowly. Even though the sight was ridiculous it was frightening. The Germans thought the Dutch were beaten and would give up, but they were wrong. It was not more than a few weeks more that the troops were replaced by the SS.

Almost immediately the repression started. Edicts to the general population were published daily and were ruthlessly enforced; curfews, black outs, food and other rationings, etc, etc. etc. Trouble was not long in coming. Men were publicly abused, women and girls were raped and disappeared. Buildings and supplies were requisitioned. The Dutch underground sprang into action immediately. German soldiers that ventured out at night were found dead in the morning. For each one the Germans rounded up a dozen hostages and shot them in public. That did not stop the killings, however. Though the Germans started shooting the hostages in the stomach and prevented their relatives from helping them, they were lying there for 2 - 3 days before they died.

Since I was still then a German citizen, I was summoned to the army headquarters but in 5 minutes I was inducted and discharged.

I guess they did not want me after all being a Jew. During the 4 days of fighting, in Holland, I tried to make my way to the coast to try to get to England. I never even made it out of Amsterdam. If a German patrol would catch me, it was curtains because I was a Jew. If a Dutch patrol would catch me, it was curtains because I was a German. When I was finally on my way, in spite of it all, Allied planes started flying over, and the shrapnel from the anti-aircraft guns fell down so thick that it seemed less dangerous to go back home. Several thousand did make it though, only about half made it to England, the rest were either blown out of the water by the Germans, or their boats floundered and they drowned.

New Jew laws were posted almost daily. You had to wear a yellow star with Jew printed on it. You had a much longer curfew as a Jew than the general population. You received shorter rations. You had to ride in front of the street car, with the motorman, if you wanted to use it. And much more. After a short while riding a street car was forbidden altogether.

The news we got was censored by the Germans and was slanted to their advantage. One of the first things the Germans confiscated from the Jews were radios and bicycles. From then on we had to walk every place. After they had taken my store from me I had a job down-town. It was several miles going and coming. We could also not listen to the BBC, and had to rely on hearsay. Even the BBC, at that time, had no good news to give. Everybody was down hearted and lost all hope.

I have to back track now. After the Krystallnacht, all Jewish men in Germany were arrested. And only if they have opportunity to leave the country were they released. Most of them, however, ended up in Buchenwald. As it so happened, my uncle and my father, knew the SS colonel in charge, my uncle had served under him in WWI, and he released both of them. My uncle, who was the president of our firm in Frankfurt, went on a business trip to South Africa and never returned to Germany. He and his family wound up in Amsterdam. My parents immediately applied for a visa to the United States. Ilse, my older sister, had been there since 1937. They called me in Amsterdam to also apply, which I did. Their visa came through in early 1939. The state department figured that we in Holland were in no danger so all the allowable quotas were given to the people who were still in Germany. As soon as my parents had their papers, they came to Holland. We rented an apartment together which was wonderful for me, because I got to eat my mothers cooking again. After about 6 months, they found transportation. They steamed to America on August 31, 1939. It was the last ship to leave Europe. On September 1st, of that year, the war broke out. Hitler invaded Poland, and since France and

England had a mutual aid pact with Poland, they declared war on Germany.

After they left, I moved in with an elderly German Jewish man and his middle aged widowed daughter. It was a one family house, on a one block long street with a small park in the center. A church had been built so that it divided one side of the street into two small streets. But the other side was a regular 4 lane outlet. This is important for the story that follows. Our house was the third house from that church. Shortly after the Germans had occupied Holland, all young German Jews were requested to come to the SS headquarters to be inducted into a work battalion.. The ones that went were never heard of or seen of again.

I did not go but was on alert all the time. One evening, as I peddled home for supper, I came around the church, I noticed 2 men standing in front of our house talking to the landlady. It was suspicious. And I was about to pass by when she said "Tailach". Now I knew for sure that they had come for me and got out of there fast. I do not know what the word "Tailach" means. It was used to warn people to get away.

When the yellow star law was passed everybody felt threatened. So I rented a small room in Amsterdam and stocked it with necessities. The underground provided me, and later on, Marga (my wife), false ID'S that did not have a big "J" stamped on it. I had sewed special pockets into the back of my pants where I hid the ID I did not have in my wallet. I switched the ID's as the need arose. I also bought a jacket that went over all my clothes and did not have a star on it. It was a dangerous cat and mouse game. But it saved me.

The Dutch people were very anti-German, but not anti-semitic, and the old lady who rented the room to me was very helpful. I must have gone through a dozen ID checks. I sweated blood every time. You just cannot get used to this kind of fear. One especially memorable event stands out in my mind clearly.

I expected my store to be taken away presently. So I decided to take my typewriter and my heavy rubber boots to my little room. I put the typewriter into a backpack and put the boots, which were knee high, and were too big, so I put them on. Jews were not allowed bicycles. We all had to turn ours in. But that was no problem since I had a bicycle store. It was late, not long before the general curfew, and there were a few inches of snow on the ground. I was about 1/2 a mile from my room when the chain came off my bicycle and no matter how hard I tried I could not get it back on. Since it was only a few minutes till curfew by now, I shouldered the bicycle and started running. The boots were

too big for my feet and slipped on and off. It was slippery and the typewriter and bike were heavy and awkward. I did not think that I would make it. But I did.

I took nightly speech therapy lessons and finally lost my German accent in Dutch. It made me feel safer and I went to that secret room at any sign of trouble. The general situation became more desperate each day. There was very little food, no clothing, no shoes. Everything, if available on ration coupons. The Dutch had precious little. The Jews even less.

I noticed the army confiscating bicycles tires from other stores so I took about 100 tires home with me and hid them in a recess in the attic. That kept us in food for many months. My store had a flashlight battery allotment which was delivered to my once a month. An army truck, followed the delivery truck and as soon as the delivery was done, they came in to confiscate the batteries. While they wrote out the papers, the Dutch underground broke through the back door and stole every one of the batteries. They could not blame me since I was talking to them. But it was hairy. It happened every time. I can't remember how many times I had to replace the lock on the back door. But I did really not mind.

One morning a Dutch Nazi came into the store and took it over. No compensation. He immediately changed the locks on the doors so I could not get in anymore. At the same time the police searched my home. Luckily they did not find the tires I had hidden.

In the winter of 1940, I met Marga. We both attended a wedding; I knew the groom, she knew the bride. I have to backtrack again now.

The Schlamm's (my future in-laws) lived in Berlin where they had a dress manufacturing firm. After the Kristallnacht, he was arrested also, but since he was a front line soldier in World War I, and was wounded, they let him off provided that he leave Germany within two weeks. There was no way to get papers that quick, so the four of them took a train to Aachen, a city very close to the Dutch border. There they made a deal with the underground railroad, who took them into Holland, in the middle of the night, through roadless woods, during a heavy rainstorm that turned the ground into mud. Since each one was taken separately, they did not know whether the others made it until the next afternoon when they met again. Holland did not return refugees so they were able to stay and Opa started another dress factory with the money he had brought with him. It was strictly against the law to bring that money but it wouldn't have made a bit of difference if they had caught him with money or without money, it would have been the end of him anyway.

They rented a beautiful apartment on an Avenue in Amsterdam similar to the Park Avenue in New York. It had a grass strip in the center and roadways on either side. The Germans had prisoners dig bomb shelters in the grass in the center strips. When Marga and I were married in the Spring, 1941, I moved in with them.

The situation in Holland grew more and more oppressive, especially for Jews. The Germans however did not deal with the Jews directly, but established a Jewish council which did the dirty work for them. The first thing they made them do was to prepare lists, Dutch Jews, German Jews, Old Jews, Young Jews, Professional Jews, etc., from which they started picking up people to send them to Poland. At that time we did not know about the death camps. We thought they would be put to work. However, it became a prime goal to stay off these lists.

Opa knew the head man of that council and we plied him with food and other things we could spare.

Opa's business was then also taken over. His new manager was a German and he and Opa hit it off well. So Opa could stay and work. Two trainloads of people in cattle cars left for the east each week and less and less yellow stars could be seen on the street. It was a simple matter of arithmetic to guess when it would be our turn.

Opa was able to talk his manager into going after an army contract and he got it. It was putting fur linings into military coats for the German troops in Russia. Twelve people were put to work including Marga and me. There was one professional furrier in the group and he taught us what to do. Truck loads of old pieces of all kinds of fur arrived, average size 2 square inches. They were cut to fit and then sewn to large sheets which then were cut into linings and then hand sewn into the coats. We had altered the pattern that they had given us so if they were to make a sudden move or strained a bit, the center seam would part. In our imagination we could see the German soldier that wore those things in Russia. That was the only satisfaction we got out of this work.

In the beginning we were still allowed to take the street car downtown to where the factory was. Later on we had to walk the five miles. I had a fun experience while we were still able to ride. Everything was blacked out, it was pitch dark outside, we had to stand in front with the motorman. Since you couldn't see a thing, we had to count the stops to know where to get off. We were talking and I lost count. When the car slowed down to go around a curve, I thought it was going to stop so I said, "Well, Goodnight, see you tomorrow" and stepped out. The streetcar, however,

had speeded up again. When I came to, I was lying in the grassy center strip. I had missed the stop by about 100 yards. Luckily for me, soon we could not ride anymore.

All our neighbors had been picked up and deported by now. We were the only ones left in the building. Can you imagine the feelings we had when we saw moving vans going up and down the streets loading furniture and belongings of the poor Jews that had been deported? The Germans did not miss a trick.

Even though there were hardly any people left to pick up, the SS went door to door each night to make sure they had not forgotten anybody. They roused us every night but our vital job protected us. That would come to an end one dark night. In spite of our protests, we were taken and put into the bomb shelters until there were enough people there to fill up a truck. As we walked out of the house, Meta gave Jutta a push aside. It was so dark the SS did not notice, so Jutta went back into the apartment.

When the truck came we were all taken to a theater that served as a collection center. Some of the seats had been taken out so there was enough room. When enough Jews were there for a trainload, we were marched to a railroad site nearby and loaded onto freight cars. Everybody had some luggage with him. We too had bought big backpacks, and had packed them incase we needed them. It was a terrible mess in that place. People lying, standing, sitting everywhere. Children crying, women wailing, everyone was nervous, and yelled at one another. We had been there two or three times before. Opa's manager got us free every time. But that came to a halt also. Finally, only Oma and Opa got free and went back to the apartment where Jutta waited.

Marga and I were sent to our first camp. The name was Westerbork. It was an old abandoned Dutch army center located in a totally barren area. The barracks were old and ramshackled. The cots were very narrow and four high. There was no room to keep anything so you shared the cot that was assigned to you with all your belongings.

Westerbork was used as a collection center. Jews from all over Holland and Belgium were brought there. Twice a weeks the long train of cattle cars was filled and sent east. The mood in camp was that of desperation. One train day when the names were called everybody shook in their boots. The poor people whose names were called pleaded, cried, shrieked, fainted, to no avail. If they did not enter the freight car on their own they were practically thrown into it. There was a constant coming and going of people. Our nerves were raw.

After a couple of days of this, I volunteered to work. I couldn't stand to watch that all day long. I was sent to the Smithy, where we made iron hinges, drawer pulls, iron frames for tile tables and nails. Everything was made by hand. The German commander was having made for himself a complete set of handmade furniture. The oak was hand sawed and hand rubbed. It kept me away from the camp. There was no work required. Marga also volunteered because she couldn't stand it any longer. and in a few days started to work in the administration.

It was not long before I came down with diarrhea. It stayed with me for the rest of my camp life. Food was scarce. We received one scoop of turnip water, they called it soup, two times a day, and a one inch slice of bread each day.

After about 3 weeks, Marga and I and about 20 others were loaded in a truck and sent to our second camp. The official name of that camp was S'Hertogen Bosch. Roughly translated that means the "Dukes woods". Since it was located near a small village names Vught, it was called Vught for short.

The barracks were better than in Westerbork, but still very primitive. They were neatly arranged with brick walks and flower beds between each one. Each barracks had a large sleeping room with metal cots, 2 high, a small day area with a large table and benches, and a bathroom with 2 spigots and 2 toilets. Each barracks housed about 60 people.

It was a genuine concentration camp. Not a death camp. It had the obligatory parade grounds in the center. One side of the grounds was a large brick building with a white arched entrance, the only access to the camp. The building was the headquarters.

The camp was divided into 4 parts; Jewish men, criminals, women, both Jewish and criminal, and industry. Each of these sections was separated from the other by tall fences. Everyone had to put in 12 hours of work. Three times a day we had "appell" a continuing ritual that all permanent camps had in common. We lined up four deep by barracks and were counted. If somebody had died, the body had to be presented for the count. After we were counted, and nobody was missing, we regrouped into work details. If the count did not come out right, we stood as long as it took for the SS to check all the barracks and every nook and cranny of the camp to find whomever was missing. If they found somebody hiding, he got 25 lashes. More about that later. Sometimes we stood 5 or 6 hours, sun, heat, rain, snow, cold.

Each barracks had an "Elder" who was appointed by the SS. He stayed in the barracks all day except for "appell". He received our daily ration of food, and he distributed it. the rations was 1 inch thick slice of bread and one scoop of

watery turnip soup twice a day. We had to stay in good terms with this elder otherwise you got only water and no diced turnips.

There were already 500-600 Dutch Jews in our compound. They were wearing civilian clothes. The criminals were in striped prison garb with a red triangle on the chest for violent crimes, green for all other crimes. The criminal women also had striped dresses. The Jewish women wore civilian clothing.

The day after we arrived, all the Jewish men were told to stay after "appell". After everybody else had left we marched (in camps you don't walk, you march) to a corner of the parade grounds where they had set up chairs and had our hair cut off. The women never lose their hair. The next day we were again told to stay. We marched to the center of the parade ground where we were told to strip completely, only belts were allowed. We left our clothes there and marched to a warehouse, where each was given a pair of striped pants, a striped jacket, a striped cap, a pair of canvas shoes with wooden soles. We then marched back to the parade grounds. It must have been quite a sight to see over 500 men march stark naked with a belt around their waste.

Once back at the parade ground, we started swapping our newly acquired outfits. They had just thrown them at us regardless of size so we were trying to find something that would do. After the men were done, the women went through the same routine.

Our uniforms had a yellow star in front. Each one also had a number. Mine was 9403. I don't think, however, they were used ever.

The next day we started work. All the Jews in the camp were somehow connected to the fur business. Only half a dozen were not. They were carpenters, electricians, or mechanics. The industry was making flyer vests for the Germans out of new material and rabbit fur linings to go with them. They were sewn together and shipped out. That is why Marga and I were sent there.

Opa had lost all of his fur workers in Amsterdam, so he sent his work to us also. The nice thing about that was that he was able to send us some additional food inside the boxes he sent which we needed badly. Our bodies had not yet gotten used to the little food we got from the camp.

One incident stands out in my mind. Opa had sent us a can of tomato soup. We had no way to heat it, so at work we propped up one of the big electric flat irons we used upside down and put the can on it. Just when the place started to smell exciting with tomato soup, the camp commander came in with a

visiting dignitary, to proudly show off his "Jews" at work. They sniffed the air and the visitor said, "Oh, it smells good here." Luckily, no questions were asked. After that, we laughed about it, but we were really scared.

There were several hundred sewing machines in use both flat stitch and fur machines. Over half of the machines were out of order and nobody to fix them. I offered to take care of them and was gratefully accepted. That was the first of two times in all the camps, that I volunteered. The second time was in Bergen-Belsen. Since I had to have parts I had the free run of the camp. I ordered what I needed from head quarters, and picked up the parts when they arrived at headquarter, again. I had to cross the whole camp to do it and of course the first couple of times I was stopped and questioned. But soon I became a familiar figure.

There was another man who had free run of the camp. His name was Werner Simon. He was the camp maintenance man and had a complete workshop. I used he workshop quite frequently since I needed to use some of the equipment he had there. And also because Werner and I became good friends. And I spent many hours talking. I will talk about him later.

My head was completely bald which seemed to be attractive to women at work. When I sat down at their machines to adjust them, they would stroke my bald pate. That was as close to sex I got in all those years.

There was an enormous pressure on us to produce, and I used any excuse I could think of to leave the industry.

The fur industry was not the only work. There were several outside commandos. They marched out of the camp after the morning appell and returned just before the evening one. They built roads and cut firewood. We heard several disturbing things about these commandos. Every so often they carried with them dead bodies. The stories went that if the SS guards did not like you they would snatch your cap off your head and throw them out of the work area. The poor devil was forced to retrieve the cap and in the act thereof was shot to death. The guards received a 3 day pass for shooting anybody who tried to flee. Since these commandos were housed in separate barracks, we were not able to verify, but there were too many bodies to be accidental.

I talked about the food before but I want to go into more detail now. In the early morning we received a slice of dark bread. It tasted like 10% saw dust. At noon and in the evening, we received a scoop of turnip soup. Soup in an overstatement. It was hot water in which the diced cubes of turnips were cooked long enough to be chewable. Totally tasteless and not nourishing. We had no place to leave leftovers, so we ate it as we got it. The only things we

had left that was our own was the belt and a blanket, a spoon and a metal bowl. Slowly, everybody acquired a small box, mainly cardboard, in which they kept their eating equipment. I had made nice wooden boxes, for Marga and me, in Werner's workshop. We sometimes tried to save a piece of bread in these boxes, but they were stolen most of the time. People were just too hungry.

Hunger started to take its toll. At this time, also, I learned a skill: Organizing. Organizing was stealing anything of value from the Germans. Whatever it was it was always good for exchange. A belt, a pair of shoes, a jacket, you name it. It bought me some needed extra rations. Every so often we had surprise bed inspection. If the bed was not made up exactly to German military standards, the blankets were taken away, and you had to sleep without cover.

The prison garb we had received had no pockets in neither pants nor jacket. If you had saved a piece of bread you carried it with you under your cap. Since we had the know how and the material, and the equipment to do so, we put in pockets, both into the jackets and pants. We had nothing to carry in those pockets except maybe an old newspaper to blow our nose, but it made us feel just a bit more human.

For several months all went well. Then one evening, during appell, a sergeant asked those with pockets to step forward. To defy that order meant 25 lashes and certain death. So, about 200 men stepped forward. The women had also acquired pockets, but nothing happened to them. After the rest of the camp was dismissed, the two hundred of us, me included, were lined up on one side of the parade grounds and had to run to the other side and then back. There we SS standing along the sides armed with long sticks with which they "encouraged" us. The first 5 runners to come back we dismissed. I made it at the 3rd or 4th time but I was so exhausted that I crept on all fours back to the barracks. Since there were many invalids and old men among us quite a few did not make it back to the barracks. They were left where they had dropped overnight. We picked their bodies up in the morning so that they could be counted with us. Needless to say, that day, all the pockets disappeared.

The criminal compound and the women's compound, had a common fence. Very tall with barbed wire on the top. Even though they knew that it would be curtains if they were caught the criminals scaled the fence in the nights when the moon did not shine and it was dark. If one was caught, and it did happen, they were publicly punished. After the evening appell, the SS dragged a specially built bench into the middle of the parade grounds, the man was strapped into the bench and after his pants had been pulled down, received 25 lashes. We had to count out loud while an SS leaned into

his job, I mean leaned, because every ounce of his strength went in to his job. When the punishment was over, all that was left of the man's behind, was a bloody pulp, with strips of skin hanging down. Within 2 or 3 days, they were dead, either blood poisoning or kidney failure, or both. The most disturbing part was to see the SS both actively engaged in these atrocities and the ones watching it, they relished every second of it, laughing and encouraging each other.

In the fall of 1943, the work loads eased. We received less material and less fur to work with and finally the shipments from Opa stopped altogether. Then one nice day Opa and Oma arrived. When there was no further defence work to be had, Opa's manager could no longer keep him in Amsterdam. Opa, Oma and Jutta, were sent to Westerbork. One of Opa's friends was one of the first to have been sent to Westerbork, when it opened in 1941. And once there became part of the camps administration. They had a small apartment there. They promised to keep an eye on Jutta so she stayed behind while Oma and Opa were shipped to Vught. There was room in my barracks so Opa moved in with me. while Oma stayed close to Marga.

Not long thereafter, work stopped altogether. Then the rumors started flying that a transport to the east was being put together to work in a fur shop. We felt safe in the Fur trade so we tried very hard to be on that train. The transport left without us and was never heard from again. Luckily, we were left behind.

As I related earlier, the bathroom facilities in the barracks were very inadequate. Once a month we marched to a shower barracks behind the industry near the edge of the surrounding forest. We undressed outside, showered with cold water, and since there were no towels, slipped back into our uniforms still wet. It was alright in summer. But in winter with snow on the ground it was tough. Many older and weaker people came down with pneumonia and since there were no drugs or doctors died. Opa and I were lucky, we never even got a cold.

One of these trips was especially memorable. When we arrived at the showers, there were 2 teenage boys standing there, their hands tied and guarded by 2 SS. The group taking a shower ahead of us was not quite done so we had to wait. I heard one of the boys ask the guard to let him go to the latrine. The answer was "Do it in your pants, it really doesn't matter in half an hour you are going to be dead anyway." Now I knew what that strange structure in the background was, it was a row of gallows. Every morning a terrible, acrid smell hung over the camp. They were executing people and cremating them. Now I also understood why we sometimes saw columns of strange people being driven

through the camp. I still have nightmares about what I saw that day.

Early in spring 1944, after the morning appell, my name was called out to come to the desk in the middle of the parade grounds. They were the longest 200 feet I have ever walked. I could not recall that I had been caught in anything wrong and was pretty well shook up by the time I reached the desk and stood at attention. The head honcho informed me that Oma, Opa, Marga, Jutta and I were going to be sent back to Westerbork after appell the next morning. I was given exact instructions, what to say and how to act. Oma and Marga also had been notified. The next morning after the counting, Opa and I in lock step marched to the desk. We had our blankets and food boxes with us. Once at the desk, we stood at attention, and I said, as I was told to do, "Two Jews to be transferred to Camp Westerbork, present." This is a liberal translation. Believe me, in military German it sounds much, much better. We were then given permission to march to the headquarters where Oma and Marga were waiting. At headquarters we were given dirty civilian clothes and shoes and under our escort, one man and one woman were driven to a railroad station. There the 6 of us entered a reserved compartment and went back to Westerbork. We had received sandwiches, and being in a people train, lifted our spirits considerably. A few days later, another transport from Vught arrived in Westerbork, also. My friend Werner Simon and his wife among them.

Westerbork was almost empty and the mood was even lower than it was when we left. And it was even more dreary if that was possible. After a few days a transport of about 800 people was readied. We were put into a regular people car and went off to what we thought was paradise, however, it turned out to be Bergen-Belsen.

While we were in Westerbork, waiting to be sent out, we found out why we were being sent to Bergen-Belsen. It was explained to us that Bergen-Belsen was kind of an internment camp, for people of dubious nationality. Here is what had happened. My Uncle Max in Amsterdam contacted a distant relative in Sweden to see if there was a way to help us. As it so happened, at that time the Consul of Ecuador in Stockholm needed money so he sold to whomever could pay Ecuadorian passports. They were genuine and when the Ecuadorian government found out about it and stopped the sale several dozen passports had already been issued. They had no choice but to declare these passports valid. Anybody with one of these passports could go to Ecuador and would automatically become a citizen. These passports actually saved our lives. All the others on that trip to Bergen-Belsen had also some kind of papers. My friend Werner and his wife were on this voyage also. We had received

sandwiches and bottle of water and were quite content. Our trip was uneventful.

Our upbeat mood did not last long, however. When we arrived at the railroad site that served Bergen-Belsen, we were greeted by an SS troop with guard dogs. They sicked the dogs into one side of the car and we fell in pairs out the other side. Everybody was bloodied. A bit down the track, we could see men under guard unloading railroad cars. We were arranged into a column four abreast, and were marched the few miles into camp.

Bergen-Belsen was enormous in size. There were several hundred thousand prisoners there, mainly Russian POW's. Also, several thousand Allied POW's, plus several compounds of civilians. All these camps were grouped around the obligatory parade grounds with roads in between them so that they could be no contact with other camps. Each compound was surrounded by high fences with barbed wire. Every thousand feet or so there was a guard tower equipped with a machine gun. We were led to a compound that already had 800-900 other Dutch Jews in it. All of them had foreign papers, most were Dutch/English dual nationals. The barracks were old wooden affairs with narrow walks between even narrower cots, two high. Even though men and women were in the same camp, they lived in separate barracks. There was a separate wash barracks, with a trough going through the center with a few dozen water spigots and along the wall, toilets. Men and women used the same facility at the same time. After a short while it becomes routine.

The food was exactly the same as in Vught. Except that the percentage of the sawdust in the bread was higher. There were three appels a day. The SS used them to punish us when they felt we needed it. And sometimes we stood most of the night. Here everybody had to work. After several months, however, most people were so weak and sick that they spent their days lying on their cots.

In order to give you an idea of what was going on in camp I will name the work details, first and then describe each one in detail. The first, camp maintenance, then shoes, then underwear, then uniform, then wood, the railroad, then motor pool, and then the crematorium. First camp maintenance who made the needed repairs and retarred the roofs. There must have been something toxic in the tar because none of the men in that detail lasted longer than about two weeks.

The next one is the shoe detail. In one large barracks there were long tables with benches where several hundred men clipped the uppers from the soles of old dilapidated military boots, clipped the seams out of the leather, and flattened the leather out then bundled it. The dust and smell were unbearable. These boots were from WWI. After

two days of this, I had enough, and when they asked for strong young men, I volunteered, and I went to the wood detail. The men who had to stay became sick mainly tuberculosis and could no longer work. Luckily the supply of boots ran out. Opa was so weak by that time that he spent all of his days at Bergen-Belsen in his bed.

The next was the underwear detail. The duties were similar to the shoe detail except that women with scissors cut usable pieces of cloth out of torn and bullet holed undershirts and bundled the pieces according to size. More on this later. Oma worked there a few days and then started coughing and spitting up blood and was sent to her barracks. She too spent the rest of her days at Bergen-Belsen in bed. Jutta was very sick and she too spent most of her time in bed.

Next the uniform detail. This is where Marga was put to work. The barrack that housed this detail was across the road from our compound. There were about 10 women working there always under armed guard. They had to sort out piles of used military uniforms by nationality, mostly Russian, all with torn limbs or bullet holes. They repaired the ones that could be repaired and bundled them to be cleaned. Can you imagine to have to work with bloody uniforms all day?? Marga became very depressed and lost so much weight that she was nothing but skin and bones. More on this detail later.

The wood detail. This detail had two sections. One that provided the wood, the other one cut it with axes and saws into fire wood. I started in the first group. We were 7 and had an old farm wagon and two guards. We would leave the camp through a side gate and went into the heath. Bergen-Belsen is located about in the center on the Lunneburger Heath where there used to be a large forest. Our task was to dig up the rather extensive roots, load them into our wagon, and deliver them to the other group. Some of those roots were so large we could get only one on our wagon. Most of the time though we were able to fit two. Those roots were full of resin and were terribly heavy. It was a genuine chore to get them onto that wagon. Then we had to pull that load uphill into the camp. The wagon had a long tongue to hold two horses. We harnessed ourselves with ropes and off we went. This detail lasted about 4 weeks. We had dug up enough wood to last through the winter. Not for us, we had no heat. But for the "master race." We joined the other group then. There were another 6 or 7 men there, some swinging big double faced axes others working with two men long saws. After swinging one of those axes every muscle in my body was sore. And when they asked if someone knew how to file saws, I said I could. I had never done it before, but it is not hard to figure out. So I sat all day long on a bench that was hinged in such a way that my weight would hold the saw in place and filed. That must have been

the best job in all of Bergen-Belsen; I sat all day in the open air doing a leisurely job.

The next detail was the railroad detail. About 20 men were trucked to the railroad site each morning, under guard of course, and there unloaded railroad cars into trucks, potatoes, raw lumber, wires and of course lots of turnips. The food for the guards came in separate cars. The Germans unloaded that themselves.

The next detail was the motor pool with 4 men in it. Lots more on this detail later.

Finally the crematorium. There were two ovens across the road from us serviced by two Jewish boys. They seemed to be well fed. We were not allowed to have contact with them. In the beginning they were lying around most of the day. I worked way into the nights. While I was on the outside with the wood detail, and later on at the motor pool, I did not attend the noon appell. Later on when I worked from 5:00 A.M. till midnight, servicing trucks, I did not attend any appells. One of the guards would come into the garage to count us. Once most of the details had been shut down, and people did no longer work, the noon appell became a means of torture. They let the people stand for 4 or 5 hours, since by now most of them were very weak and sick, lots of people fainted, and were left lying there where they fell until the appell was called off.

I described the wash barracks earlier. They were connected to a primitive sewer system. Since everybody by now was underfed, and suffered from diarrhea, and there was no toilet paper available, or no paper available as such, somebody had the smart idea to smuggle some of the underwear pieces into camp and use them as toilet paper. It was not long before the sewer system was completely clogged up. If the washroom was a mess before, now it was a real mess. It was undescrivable. So, one morning, everybody who could carry a shovel or swing a pick ax, was rounded up, and marched into the heath outside the camp. Here we dug a hole, about 100 foot by 100 foot, 6 foot deep, into which the sewage was supposed to be pumped in order to repair the sewer system. When we were finished with digging, they brought up a sump pump, and started pumping. It wasn't 3 minutes before the pump was clogged up too. PANIC. Nobody knew what to do. Ever since Vught I carried with me a pair of pliers, a screw driver, a spoon and a knife. So I stepped out of line and fixed the pump.

On our march back to the camp, the top sergeant, who also was in charge of all the work details, walked next to me, leading a bicycle, and asked whether I was a mechanic. I said yes, so he asked me if I could fix the flat on his

bike. When I said I could, that this was my specialty, he transferred me to the motor pool.

Up to this time, we worked 6 1/2 days. Sunday afternoons we could visit with family or launder the few clothes we had. Marga and I always saved some bread for this occasion and found a spot away from people to have a picnic. We always were talking about food and were inventing new recipes. That somehow helped us overcome the nagging pain of hunger that we felt.

Once a month, for the evening feeding, we received bread soup. The leftover bread was cooked until it is soft and then a bit of sugar was added. After eating turnips all the time, this bread soup tasted like ambrosia. So on one of our picnics, we decided that in commemoration we would have bread soap once a month if, and that was a big if, we would make it out of camp. Marga actually made bread soup after we arrived in Detroit but it was so bad we could not eat it, so we abandoned the idea.

After the experience with the clogged sewer, however, we had no more time off. The Sunday after "sewer day", we were kept after the noon appell. We lined up in single file, and marched to one corner of our compound. There we picked up two handfuls of sand, and carried them to the opposite end. There we dumped sand and marched back for some more. After a few hours of that, there was a big hole in the ground at one end of the camp ground and a respectable hill in the other corner.

The next Sunday afternoon, the operation was reversed. We picked up the hill and returned the sand to the hole. After several more Sunday afternoons of the same activity this kind of work was abandoned. Since by then with few exceptions, nobody worked anymore, the only pestering was done during noon appell.

The situation in the camp worsened by the week. There were deaths all the time. Where death was once rare, it now became routine. Every night, three, four, five, six people died, some were bunk neighbors. The mood in the camp became more morbid by the day.

We did not receive any war news. Saw new prisoners arrive everyday and had to assume that Germany was winning the war. That, too, did not help our moral.

The motor pool was located off to one side of the parade grounds. In order to get there we were picked up by armed guards, marched down the road in front of our compound, to a big gate. All of this under the watchful eyes of the guard towers. It was always a dangerous trip. The road was rough dirt road, anybody that miss stepped or fell had a chance to

be shot. One of our friends, one Sunday afternoon, when walking with his wife, came too close to the fence and was shot. He laid there until he died. We were not allowed close to him. We walked that road very carefully on the outside of the gate. When we came to the gate, there was a guard house on the other side. When we marched up to that gate, a guard opened it to let us through. Then our guards had to unload their rifles in front of a sergeant. That was not an easy task. They carried old bold action rifles, every time they opened the magazine a shell would fly out. They had to hold the rifle in one hand and catch the shell in the other. They always had 3 shells loaded and most of the time they dropped one in the dirt. The guard got a good chewing out right in front of us. We loved it. From there we marched to the garage. Going home was the same routine in reverse.

The garage had five trucks and an enormous tractor. We were five Jewish boys, each one had one truck to be in charge of and had to keep it in good working order. There was right next to it a complete workshop, and office for the lieutenant in charge and next to the office was a "smithy". All of this was housed in a large metal building. Besides each of us having to take care of a truck each had been given another duty. Mine became bicycles. Other duties were cleanliness, workshop maintenance, gasoline supplies and so on. Each truck had a designated driver who then also felt to be in complete charge of his "Jew". My driver was in his early 60's, crotchety and mean, and also was the only one who could handle the tractor. In the beginning I had a real problem with my driver, nothing I did was right. It took me a month to win his confidence. He then was easier to get along with and started to let up on me. It was a real problem. He driver took his boy under his protection. This if there was a falling out among them we had to pay for it. The moment your driver was gone, you were kicked around by whoever was in and I mean this literally. I knew I had it made with my driver when he came in and with a slap in my face in anger, "You Goddamm Jew, you did not tighten the tarp correctly." I knew I had not touched it so when I went over to look I found a loaf of bread between the side of the truck and the tarp. A thing like that happened about once every month or so.

My first bike customer was the sergeant with the flat tire. There were no bike parts available for anybody in Germany anymore. So if you broke down you were out of commission. The Germans used the bikes to visit their girlfriends since the nearest village was about 4 miles away the bikes were at a premium. When I took that tire off that bike, the inner tub was completely shot. As inner tubes age, They stretch, this one was about 1/3 too long, and had several dozen patches. Every time they took the inner tube out, to fix a flat, they had to fold it to get it back inside the tire and

every fold broke and became another leak. The inner tube at this time were not molded, as they are now, but had a weld where they were put together. Also the valve was metal and was screwed into the tube. I could cut the weld out including the part that was too long, took the valve out and reversed the tube. I then attached the valve again and rewelded the tube. Now all the patches were on the inside and I had a virgin territory on the outside. I patched the few leaks then and returned the tube into the tire. The sergeant was beyond himself with joy.

We became friends as far as a Jew and a Nazi could be friends. He came often to let me fix things for him. One day he handed me a nice piece of leather that he had gotten from the shoe detail and asked me whether I could make him a holster for his pistol. His holster was open and he had to clean the pistol each night because of the sand and dust. He wanted one with a leather flap that was more protective. I said yes and he handed me his pistol. In the last second he pulled back, and unloaded it. I proceeded to make him a new holster. And he was happy. As he picked the holster and pistol up he asked me if I would have shot him if he had not unloaded and without hesitation I said yes. I thought so, he said smiling as he walked away. When I told Marga this story, she said, But they would have killed you." She of course is right. But then all I could think of was to take 5 or 6 of these SOB's with me.

Word got out and before long I had a dozen bikes stacked up. Since the truck was the primary duty, I could never fix more than a bike a day. Soon they started coming in with bribes, a sandwich with butter and marmalade would put your bike ahead of the others. For a sandwich with sausage, you could wait while your bike was being fixed. One day while the commandant car was in the garage to be washed, on driver got in and started to nap. I didn't know that he was in there so when a soldier came in with his bike and gave me a sandwich, the driver saw it and gave me a good beating. I was more careful after that.

Early in Spring two old Hungarian Jews arrived. They were blacksmiths and worked to repair some farm wagons. I watched them putting on an iron rim around a wooden wagon wheel and was fascinated. The rhythm of their hammers striking the iron could be heard all over the garage. It was soothing and I enjoyed it. I missed these two old men after they died

Since they marched out with us we became friends even though we could not understand each other. They were very religious and when Pesach came, refused to eat the bread they got. Nothing I tried could persuade them to eat the bread. I feared for them so I took their bread and gave

them my soup, to no avail. Shortly after Pesach they were both dead.

In early summer the death rate excellerated. People were totally emaciated and died by the dozens. A pale of doom hung over the camp. We heard rumors about an allied evasion but since we could not get confirmation we did not believe it. Allied planes started to fly over every night and we could see Hamburg and Hanover burning. The guards became even meaner. The meaner they got the more we hoped the war would be over soon. It was our only hope to come out alive. The crematorium was now working day and night and on still days the smell was unbearable.

One day after a trainload of potatoes had arrived, my driver came back from the railroad site, and took the five of us back with him. As it turned out, he and the sergeant of the railroad detail had made a bet that the 5 of us could unload a railroad car of potatoes faster than the 20 men of the detail. Since we were able to steal or receive extra food, we were in pretty good shape, but the boys in the detail were gaunt and starving and we knew our lives depended on winning so win we did. But it was no easy task, belive me.

Oma, Opa and Jutta were not doing well but were hanging in there. Marga deteriorated quickly and worried me. There just was not enough food and everybody had a bad case of diarrhea. I was thin as a rail but strong. In the summer of 44 I cut my hand on a piece of tin, and developed blood poisoning. When the infection reached my elbow, the doctor that lived in my barracks decided to operate. I had nothing to lose. There were no medical supplies, no way to sterilize anything. I was put on my back on a table and several men were holding me down. There was no anesthetics and when the good doctor cut the wound open with his pocket knife, I kicked so hard that they could not hold me and had to let go. After the poison was drained out, I was bandaged with some old newspapers. Two days later I was back at work. It is amazing what resources a body can corral when it is in trouble.

About 100 yard from the garage was our gasoline bunker. It was dug into the ground and stuck up about 3 feet covered with grass. There were several steps down. Inside were barrels with gas that had to be pumped into 5 gallon cans that could be carried to the garage. The pump had a handle on it that you had to push back and forth. We had enough strength to move the handle but not the endurance and after awhile, faltered. Since the bunker was out of ear shot, we were subjected to abuse. The beatings were brutal. Boy did I hate to have to go and get gas. Luckily the camp ran out of gasoline. One Thursday afternoon, both the drivers and the five of us, were called into a meeting. We were told that wood generators would arrive the next day and were

given schematics. The next day, Friday, the generators arrived, and the lieutenant dropped the bombshell on us. The commandant had an important visitor this Sunday and the lieutenant had promised that one truck would be converted and running on wood. We protested that we could not work 48 hours in a row in our weakened state, and within an hour a 50 liter insulated container with A-# 1 food arrived. Boy, did we eat. There even was meat in it, the first I had in 2 years.

Let me describe the generators and their operation. They were like water tanks, 4 feet round, about 8 feet tall. They had a hatch on top to fill in the wood and also a fire grate with a door and room for ashes. Three inch pipes went from near the top to two filters under the truck like 30 gallon drums one was filled with water the other with excelsior. From there along side the exhaust system to keep the gas warm it was fed into the motor. We put charcoal on the grate and then dropped hard wood the size of bricks through the hatch. When we lit the charcoal it would start the hard wood smoldering. There was a fan that could be controlled from the cab. The developing whitish gas was then forced into the engine. It was simple but effective. The trucks were hard to start however, more later.

We welded the tank to the truck body and welded a ladder to it so we could reach the hatch on top. Several times a day the trucks would come in to have the wood refilled and the ashes removed. At night the fire was let go out. So first thing in the morning we had to clear out everything and restart the fire. The filters had also to be cleaned. To do this we had to lie under the truck. In wintertime, in the snow, that was hard since we had no adequate clothing. It was also difficult to shoulder a 100 lb. sack of hardwood and walk up the ladder with one hand, open the hatch and dump the wood. We worked the 48 hours as prescribed and at about noon on Sunday we pushed the truck outside, loaded the generator and the filters and started it up. First we found several leaks in the tubing that had to be fixed and then hooked the truck to another one that still ran on gas and towed it around the camp. The motor had to be hot before the wood gas would catch. So it took several trips before it came to life. The truck made it back to the garage on its own power. We had to make several timing adjustments but by the time the "dignitaries"(said facetiously) arrived the motor ran smoothly.

As you can imagine everybody involved was relieved. After this success we converted the other 4 trucks also. We kept the wood on the other side of the gas bunker in an old hut. It was spread out on the floor and had to be turned each day to dry it out. There was always a guard with us when we went to get wood, however, one day the guard went outside to smoke. I reconnoiter and found a big sack of dog biscuits.

This hut had been used for a kennel at one time. Oh, did those biscuits taste good. That kept us from being hungry for several days.

The morning rituals became a real chore. The SS guards knew our bunks and woke us up every morning at 5:00. We marched in and loaded the converter filters and started the charcoal. The first truck, when ready, was then towed around the camp by the tractor. Once it came alive it towed the other trucks.

The tractor was a huge, ancient affair with 6 feet tall metal rear wheels and lugs. It could run on gasoline or diesel or kerosene. Its one cylinder was as big as a 10 gallon can. The steel steering wheel was held in the floorboard by a spring catch. To start the tractor we unhooked the steering wheel and inserted it on the side of the engine. It weighed at least 30 pounds. It had a cross pin which inserted into a worm in the engine. Three of us strained to turn the motor over until it started up with an ear deafening noise. The steering wheel was then thrown out of the worm and flew 20 to 30 feet into the garage. We took turns to see who would have to be in front of the wheel since he also was thrown into the garage. The other two could jump aside. We then hooked a chain between the tractor and the first truck and started out. Since I was the one in charge of the tractor also, it was my job to go along. I had to sit on the front fender of the truck and unhook as soon as the truck came alive. This had to be done on the run so that the truck did not have to idle but could stay in gear. After several near misses to have my legs squeezed off between the trucks we constructed a heavy V-bar that kept the 2 vehicles apart. As the season got colder and snow started falling, it was murder. All we had on was a blue overall, no underwear, and wood shoes with canvas tops. First, to sit on that fender in ice cold winds and then to unhook at 10 miles per hour speed, was total agony. Most of the time our overalls were wet from lying in the snow to service the generator and filters. Oddly enough, none of us ever got sick.

Not far from the garage, was an NCO club. They were always dumping leftover food in the cans behind it. Since we had to wait for the trucks to come in everyday, sometimes till midnight, we used the cover of dark to sneak over there to get something to eat. To be caught meant immediate execution. But we did it anyway. When you are hungry you take all kinds of chances. One night I found a jar of muscles. They were so spoiled, they were black. I ate them and never got sick from it either. Now when I see people eat muscles, my stomach turns.

On the other side of the parade grounds, not far from the gate we had to come through, was the food warehouse.

Sometimes when our trucks unloaded food they had brought in, they would stall and we had to go over there and start it up again. That always meant a good sandwich with lots of butter. It made us sick, but who cared. Even Marga was able to get there several times and get some sandwiches when the soldiers there needed uniforms repaired and she brought them back.

By now I worked 7 days a week, 18-20 hours a day and therefore saw very little of the folks. Marga sometimes would wait up for me so we could talk. The people by now were so much deteriorated that the SS finally dispensed with the appels altogether. Our compound received new arrivals though. There were Jews from Benghazi, Libya, who had been moved from camp to camp in Germany. They were much better fed than we were and wore bright, exotic clothing. They spoke Arabic and French and communication was difficult. They stayed there until the end.

One blustery cold wintery day, while I was working outside on a truck, a convoy entered the parade grounds. I had seen an awful lot by now but nothing prepared me for this. Several trucks were loaded with women and children, all totally naked. Some had papers wrapped around them and their kids. When they were unloaded they were wailing a crying from cold and of hunger. Then the SS separated the children from their mothers and threw them into a truck. One little kid clamored down to go back to his mother but was shot dead. After the truck with the children drove off, the women were marched off in a different direction. I do not know what happened to them or where they came from.

The commandant had brought his motorcycle to the garage with a flat and the lieutenant told me he would be back for it at 4:00 pm. I fixed the flat and was just about to tighten the valve core when my truck came in for service. I told the driver that all I had to do was tighten the valve but he exploded and beat me up and forced me to take care of his truck first. While I was outside filling th converter with wood, the commandant came in to pick up his bike, It was flat but the lieutenant had seen me fix it so he pumped it up and commandant, a full colonel, rode off. Five minutes later he came back walking his motorbike and asked who did that to him. Everybody pointed at me. He was so mad he kicked me in the rear. It took almost 20 years to heal. He cracked the lowest vertebra. By the way, his name was Kramer. He and his girl friend, Ilse Kotch, were both hanged by the Nuremburg trials. He for the death of more than 100,000 Russian POW's, she for making lampshades out of tattooed human skins. When she saw a prisoner with a tattoo she liked she had him killed.

The rumors about an allied invasion became more and more insistent and we started to believe them because the mood of

the SS became even fouler if that was possible. Allied planes flew over in ever greater numbers. And the nightly bombings increased. We started to feel some hope but had doubts that we could hang on long enough if liberation was delayed too long. On the few occasions that Marga and I had time to talk we made plans in case we were freed. We designated a spot where to meet, decided what to bring along and started saving scraps of bread. Of course the folks were so weak they could hardly get out of bed but we were sure that they would gather the strength if liberation was here.

Even at the garage, verbal abuse increased. We were addressed by cuss words only and the abuse and the kicks were myriad. Somehow I started to enjoy it because I knew that this anger was brought on by reverses in the war. One cuss word I particularly enjoyed was "Jordon Planchers". It somehow loses in translation.

When barracks parts arrived by train, the still able men in our compound were recruited to put them up in an empty compound not far from ours. These must have come from Poland. On some of the walls we found the story of the Warsaw ghetto uprising in French, Polish and Yiddish. This was the first we had heard about it.

It was now November 1944. It was bitter cold, no heat in any of the barracks. The folks suffered badly. And hope for survival diminished. I am not literate enough to describe the situation and the mood adequately, you have to use your own imagination. The population of our camp which was close to 1000 when we first came, was down to only about 1/2 of that. Only the fittest survived. Marga, who still worked in the uniform detail, started our streak of luck. While going through some Hungarian uniforms she found 4 gold coins. Two, American \$10.00 and one Austrian and one Dutch. Somehow we knew that our chances for survival had increased. This is what we did. Oma took the Dutch coin and inserted it into a tube of old toothpaste which she had not used since she entered camp but which she had kept. Opa opened the back of a wooden hair brush and carefully carved out a space for the Austrian coin. To let you know what we did with the other two coins, I have to go back a few years. While I had the store in Amsterdam, I had to commute by bike. It was cold, very cold and very windy and very, very damp in winter in Amsterdam. So I had bought a leather coat to keep me from getting pneumonia. When we were first picked up and sent to Westerbork, I left this coat with our friends in their small apartment since I was not allowed to take it to Vught. When we came back from Vught, I picked it up and had it with me at Bergen-Belsen. I wore it seldom since I feared the SS would take it from me, but I wore it on rare occasions. It had to be unbearably cold and wet. This coat had buttons of real leather braid around wood

cores. We carefully undid two of these buttons and replaced the wooden disks with the two US gold coins. I did not know it then, but this coat played a role in our release.

I had gotten a loaf of bread from my driver that fateful day and when we were ready to march back to our compound, I stuck the bread into the front of the coat. I wore it that day because it was freezing cold and sleeting. As we arrived at the guard house, my friend the sergeant was waiting for us and instead of marching us to our camp, he marched to the headquarters. Luckily it was pitch dark so nobody discovered the bread. I was sweating blood and saw myself facing the business end of a gun if I was detected. At headquarters, we each were handed 2 typewriters and with those marched to the barracks that just had arrived and in the dark put them on a row of tables that had been set up. I carried a typewriter under each arm and tried not to exhale too much so the bread would not slide down and fall out of the coat. I was sweating in spite of the cold and the sleet. I cannot remember having been so happy to be back in that crummy barrack.

The year, 1944, came to a close. As a X-mas present, we received our daily turnip soup laced with Tapioca and sugar. Oh, did that taste good. The same treat again on New Year's Day. Shortly thereafter, I was called to the lieutenant's office. He always had been nice to me but I was scared anyway. What had I done now to be called in. Two armed guards were waiting in his office for me and I said my prayers. I was standing at attention before his desk when he told me, smilingly, they want you back in your camp, next week at this time you will be swimming. I didn't understand what he meant but was marched off to our compound. There I met Marga. She too had been marched back by 2 guards. The Germans called an appell right then and as their names were called people formed a line, 4 abreast as usual. Our names were called also, and soon all 5 of us marched to the camp where the typewriters were where we were registered and were questioned. We hoped this was a good sign but with the Nazi's you never know. I was not allowed to go back to work. Neither was Marga. A few days later, we were told to pack up. A truck entered the compound. Our belongings were loaded up and we marched to a barracks near headquarters where our baggage, if you could call it that, was piled on the floor. As each families names were called, we stepped forward to be examined by the doctor. He never came closer to us than 10 feet. Oma and Opa were so weak, that they could not stand on their own so I held them up by their collars. Marga did the same to Jutta. Then we had to open our baggage to be inspected. I don't know why, we really had nothing to smuggle out. Oma's tube of toothpaste fell out of her things and hit the floor with a sickening thud. The SS who checked her luggage bent down and put it back. He never noticed how heavy the tube was or the thud it made

when it hit the ground. After that we were trucked to the railroad siding and entered a train. People cars. We received sandwiches and off we went. When Oma heard we were about to be shipped out she did not want to go. She complained that now that they gave us better food she had to leave. She liked that Tapioca so much she wanted to stay on. There were 300 of us on that train.

The 300 of us were complete families. None had lost a member while in camp. The train was heavily guarded but we were treated well and were fed regularly. We went east to Berlin where we spent the night at a siding during an air raid. Then we headed south and entered Switzerland at Basel. On the way we passed the famous Leunaworks, where Germany extracted gasoline from coal. They have no natural oil. It was almost totally destroyed. Also, a few hours before we reached Switzerland, we stopped at a small town. Five people had died on the way, they were unloaded. Also, the names of 140 others were called. They had to leave the train. We later learned that they were held in an internment camp where they were treated well and had rather good food. They were liberated by French forces who at gunpoint got them decent clothing.

The Americans were holding 300 Germans, mostly musicians, that were caught in the war. The Germans only had 145 American citizens so they need 155 to make the exchange even. We were the ones. The 140 that had to leave the train still in Germany went into the camp that the 145 Americans had left. When they boarded our train, to be exchanged, they were kept apart from us because the conditions we were in. When we stopped at the platform at Basel, the train with the Germans was already there. They came out of their train, we came out of ours, we entered their train, they entered ours, and the exchange was completed. The American cars were unhooked and pulled away. We went into the interior of Switzerland and the Germans went to Germany. When all is said this exchange is the highlight of the whole story. We actually were out of Germany, and among people who meant us no harm. We were too dazed to comprehend this tremendous occasion and too sick to enjoy it. My memory for the next few weeks with the exception of highlights is rather hazy.

I have to pause now to do some philosophizing. The Germans killed 11,000,000 civilian prisoners. Some large percentage were young and strong and could have been of some use to them. Why did they then preserve us. After we left Bergen-Belsen, the situation there deteriorated to a point where very few survived. The 300 Germans in America, North and South, for which we were exchanged could not have been that valuable to the Germans. Why did they preserve the few hundred Jews at Bergen-Belsen, fed them everyday and kept them alive. The only plausible explanation I can find or

can think of, is that early there was a plan formulated to make that exchange and that once it was in the bureaucratic pipeline, it just kept alive. On the other hand, it is hard to believe that those 300 Germans wanted to go back and not ask for asylum. After all they must have known about the conditions in Germany by that time. Whatever it was, it saved us, and who is complaining. -

OK, here is the rest of the story: We arrived at our destination in Switzerland after dark. We were bussed to an old factory that had been converted to house people. They had built six foot wide shelves along the wall three high and had filled them with straw. That's where we slept these 5 days. There were only a handful of toilets. After about an hour there, an old Swiss soldier came in with a bucket full of sausages in one hand and a bucketful of potatoes in the other. He was hardly through the door when his buckets were empty. He stood there with his mouth wide open. He had never seen starved people. He came back several times until we had had enough. Oh, it tasted so good. In a short time, however, we all got violently sick. We had not eaten potatoes or sausage in so long, our bodies could not absorb it. By midnight we were all squatted outside in the snow. You can imagine what it looked like before we came it was all beautiful white snow.

First Marga became violently ill and by ambulance went to the hospital. There they could not believe what they saw. Besides being very sick and completely emaciated, she was filthy and one of the nurses berated her for not keeping herself clean. Marga was too sick to answer her. Then Oma started to spit up blood again and was taken to the hospital too. Then Opa started heart trouble and was taken there, also. Since Jutta was pretty sick herself, she went along. So when the call came to get ready to move on, I was left alone to pack up for 5. We were paraded to a waiting train and all the ones that were in the hospital arrived also. Everybody, except Marga. She had been diagnosed as having typhoid fever. The German's had inoculated all of the women that worked in the uniform detail to prevent sickness as they say. I believe, however, that they were used as guinea pigs. I refused to enter the train without her and fought off any attempt to put me on by force. Finally, they brought Marga. She was semi-conscious. I found an empty compartment and put her to sleep on one of the benches. We were hardly on the way when an American officer came in and insisted that I let other people come into the compartment. I showed him how sick Marga was to no avail. He kept insisting that he had three people that needed to sit down. I finally had to give in, and the 3 came in. You guessed right, it was Oma, Opa and Jutta. Here we were together again.

We were under American tutelage now. They had been warned by the Swiss doctors and we were fed only hot cereal. The train took about 24 hours to get to Marselle. It was the end of January, 1945. The weather was beautiful. Marga, who drifted in and out, was unconscious when we arrived. So two big black corpsmen put her on a stretcher and carried her to the American hospital ship that was anchored in the harbor. It was several 100 feet from the train to the harbor and about midway she woke up. We had seen very few black people in our lives so when she looked up and saw those two she thought she had died and gone to hell. She let out a blood curdling scream. I had been walking about 10 feet behind her. It took me quite sometime to calm her down. Even though the transport that was to take us to North Africa was waiting for us, the Americans thought it was better to take us to the hospital ship and give us a physical. We were in lamentable condition, dirty, dressed in rags, skin and bones, hungry, unkempt, unshaven, and so on. Once on board, we took showers, we all got toilet kits and shaved, and cut each others hair. My clothes were in such bad shape, (remember, I got these clothes when we left Vught a year before and they were well worn then) that they threw them overboard and gave me a pajama and later a set of used khakis. After we had cleaned up and felt a lot better and sat on deck in the sun. When the dinner bell rang we stood in the cafeteria line. Such delights. We had not seen such food in three years. Three kinds of eggs, three kinds of potatoes, all kinds of steak, ham, egg and sausage, several kinds of bread, butter, jam and jelly, coffee, tea, milk, orange juice, tomato juice, apple juice, you name it, it was there. As hungry as we were we could not resist and each got a heaping tray full. After we had eaten we went back on deck to sit in the sun. No more than 1/2 hour later we were all, no exception, hanging over the railing, feeding the fish. Our belly extended like basketballs, and we thought we would explode. The doctor feared they would lose us all but of course in a couple of hours we were fine. We all had been desperately sick but thought it was all worth it. We were put on hot cereal diet and were put on the road to recuperation.

Marga had been taken at once to the intensive care unit of the ship. The doctors confirmed that she indeed had a bad case of typhoid fever. She was, however, so emaciated, that they could not medicate her without risking her life. She refused food or drink. They had given up hope for her and talked about her case at the dinner table. A young Jewish psychiatrist at the table asked to get a shot at her. He talked to her at length but could not persuade her to take food she so desperately needed. He then pulled a chocolate bar out of his pocket and very deliberately unwrapped it and bit off a piece. When Marga saw that chocolate, she grabbed it and proceeded to eat it. From then on they were able to

feed her and medicate her and by the time we came to North Africa, she was strong enough to walk.

After 3 days on the hospital ship, we were transferred to an old Italian tramp that took us to our new destination. She was an ancient freighter. They had welded stanchions into her hold and suspended metal cots from them. There was no fresh air down there and the stench was unbearable. I slept the 5 days we were at sea on deck. Marga was still pretty sick and was put into one of the ships officers cabins. I was allowed to visit her twice a day. She looked stronger and better every time I saw her. We again were fed hot cereal but once a day got a slice of bread with margarine and jam. They had built wooden latrines hanging over the side. They were very efficient and since we still were sick they were put to good use. The ship was so old that in order to calculate the speed a sailor threw a line over the railing. It had a small propellor at the end. The sailor held the other end loosely in his hand and counted the revolutions.

On the morning of the fifth day we arrived in Phillippeville, Algeria. It was a beautiful sight. White washed houses on the side of hills interspersed with palm trees all under a sunny blue sky. The bougainvillea were in bloom and smelled wonderfully. We all thought we had reached heaven.

Once ashore, we were loaded onto open lorries, that is all they had, and trucked the 5 miles to the U.N.R.R.A. camp in Phillippeville, Algeria. The baggage went on separate trucks. As we entered the camp, we passed a guard house with armed guards. The camp was surrounded by a tall fence. When we saw the barbed wire, we all cried, "No, not barbed wire again." We later learned that the fence was not there to keep us in but to protect us from thieves. We could come in and go as we wished. First we were driven to a building that was used for delousing. We had to undress, men in one room, women in another. The clothing went through a heat chamber, while we were sprayed with DDT. After that we were assigned our rooms. In Amsterdam we had fashioned a rabbit fur lining for Oma's coat and sewn it between the cloth and the lining so that it would not be taken from her. When it came out of that heat chamber, the fur had shrunk and the coat was one big ball.

Opa came into camp with a black homburg. He held on to this hat for dear life. It was his only link to civilization. It, too, had been waiting for him in Westerbork, and all the time in Bergen-Belsen he had it hanging from his bedpost. He brushed it everyday. It was his pride and joy. When it came out of the heat chamber, it had shrunk to about 1/3 it's original size. Opa was crushed.

The camp was built on top of steep dunes several hundred feet from the Mediterranean. We were housed in Quonset huts that had four entrances, one on each end and one in the center of each side. Each corner had 4 rooms, about 8 x 10 feet square, with walls 8 ft high. Since the hut was twice that tall you could hear any word spoken anywhere. Oma and Opa and Jutta were put into another hut that had double size rooms. We were not the only ones in camp. When we came there were already several hundred displaced persons, all kinds of nationalities including two Chinese. There also was a wash hut with showers and tubs. Men and women had separate times. There were also laundry facilities.

On one end of the camp, was the kitchen. There was only a very small dining area. You were supposed to pick up your food and eat it in your room. The room was bare except for 2 cots with an English ranger mattress on each. The bottom third of these were tapered off to a point so the rangers could sleep on them with their boots on. For us it was hard to sleep on without rolling off.

Each family received a pot to carry the food in, plates and utensils. Sanitary napkins, soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, brush and reserve clothing. We even received bed linens and pillows. We used the sanitary napkins to square off the mattresses. It was several months before the women needed to use them and by then we got more.

The Quonset huts were of course, metal. And in the North African sun became unbearably hot inside. Each room had two windows that however, did not open. We were on the outside corner and had three. I studied them and found out they were nailed in with 4 nails, two on each side. I borrowed a hack saw, and cut through the lower two nails. This way the lower part of the window could swing out. A stick of wood kept it open. The cross ventilation kept the temperature bearable.

I went out scrounging and furnished our room with a cable spool for a table, and two smaller ones for chairs. I also found two old benches, that stacked up, served as closets.

The camp was an old English army camp left over from the North African campaign. There we lived in luxury and comfort for 5 months. The food was monotonous but adequate. It consisted 6 days a week of potatoes, string beans and Spam. Once a week we got fresh meat. They baked their own bread and we could get as much as we wanted. In the beginning I ate 6 loaves a day. One for breakfast, one for coffee break, one for lunch, one for afternoon break, one for dinner and one just before bed. To drink we had coffee with salt. The water was tainted with Tuberculosis and had to be boiled. I had scurvy, which is a vitamin deficiency sickness so badly when I came into camp that I had trouble

to swallow. On the train to North Africa, it closed up completely on me. I organized a large onion and ate it like an apple. I cried a lot while I ate it. I don't know if it was because of the onion or because of the pain. It cauterized my throat so I could swallow again.

Outside of our camp, there were food vendors. When we arrived each one had received \$5.00 in Switzerland and with this money we bought oranges. In a week my throat was healed again.

One of the first things I did after our arrival was to send my folks a wire which read, "All 5 are well, send money." More on this later.

After a couple of weeks we discovered, within walking distance, a small house where they sold wine. Heavy, red, muscatel for 5 Francs a liter which was only a few cents, American. We cleaned out a few five gallon cans, suspended them on a long pole and brought back the wine safari style. Each evening when it had cooled off we would assemble and sit out on the sand and drink the wine, reminisce and sing. It was wonderful. It was life as it was meant to be. We went swimming in the sea most everyday. The diarrhea stopped and we started gaining weight. To give you an idea of how thin we were, when I took a shower on the hospital ship the water would stand in my hips. One night there must have been something wrong with the food. We all got sick. The latrine was a long building which was originally built for soldiers with two rows of 12 holes back to back. They had put up a wooden partition to divide into men and women. That night there was a full house on both sides. We had an unplanned social hour.

Our camp was the center one of three camps. Each one had a paved road coming up from the coastal highway, One camp housed the administration and hospital, the other was warehousing and home to the 3 dozen soldiers that guarded the whole compound. The Arabs were so poor that they stole anything they could lay their hands on. The soldiers were Yugoslavs that had surrendered to the British who had uniformed them and armed them.

My friend Werner Simon was also with us. His wife got sick on the trains and went straight to the hospital. After about 4 weeks she was well enough to come back to her husband. He had made elaborate plans of furnishing his room which was a hut down the road and he asked me to help him. It was hot so we started out having a few sips of wine. That stuff was so good and smooth that you could not stop once you started so we did not stop. When I failed to come home to pick up our food that evening Marga came looking for me. Here we were lying on the bare floor, completely drunk without having done any work. She and a neighbor brought me home and put

me on top of my cot. Then she went out to get the food for us and the folks. She stayed there to eat and it was late when she came to our room. I had by then slept off some of it and became amorous. We were both of us not well enough but go and tell that to a drunk. I finally fell asleep again. I woke up in the morning just in time to hear our neighbors across the hall talk about me. They were an old couple of Germans, he had served in the US NAVY. I never did find out how they wound up in that camp. They were both in their 80's. They had an odd way of talking to each other. He said, "Did she hear last night what went on across the hall?" She said, "Yes, she heard." She then asked, "Did he understand what was going on?" He said, "No, he did not understand." Luckily I had used Dutch that they did not speak. That was the last time I was drunk.

Shortly after we arrived I volunteered to work in the motor pool. It kept me with something to do and it earned me some pocket money. We had three English lorries that ran pretty well but had no batteries. About a mile down the road were several dozen German Ambulances from Rummels campaign, they had air cooled motors with slide valves that quickly wore out in the sands of North Africa. We got all the batteries out of them and used the good cells in them to redo batteries for our own lorries.

When some money from my parents arrived, we went into Phillippeville to buy some necessities. A lorry went into town each morning and back to camp each afternoon at a set time. So, transportation was no problem. Our teeth were almost black from lack of calcium so a sympathetic druggist mixed us a potion, soon our teeth were white again. We bought mainly eggs in town and fresh vegetables and fruit.

Once every two to three weeks there was a camp wide affair with entertainment. With us, since Bergen-Belsen was a young couple, he had polio and was in a wheel chair. We became friendly in Bergen-Belsen because I kept his wheel chair in working condition. They were with us in North Africa but were housed in the hospital camp. They had paved roads there, we did not. For these meetings, 4 of us would walk to the Hospital attached ropes to each corner of his wheelchair and walked him down the steep road to the coastal highway several hundred feet down the highway and up the steep road to our camp. Afterwards we walked him back. On those nights we were asked in to have a drink after we had brought him back. I never got drunk again but was happy when I came back home and gave the old folks something to talk about.

The war in Europe ended in May and travel restrictions were lifted. Once a week one of our trucks went to Constantine where there was a French garrison and brought in fresh meat and supplies. It is a long trip across the dessert but we and the Simons went along one week and spent a few days

there. On our way we saw a troop of honest to goodness Foreign Legion with half tracks and camels. Constantine is an ancient walled city cut in half by a gorge about 50 feet wide and several hundred feet deep. We stayed two nights in a hotel that overlooked the old city. It was magnificent. We were visiting the Sooks where we met several Jewish artisans that made gold and silver jewelry. It was beautiful but we did not have enough money to buy.

One afternoon a Sirrocco blew in, it was so hot that you could not stay outside. Since our train left that afternoon, we walked to the station stopping at every cafe to have a cold Coke. The train was a Micheline. It had pneumatic wheels and gives a totally smooth ride. No clickety-clacks. As the train left the station, hundreds of Arabs jumped on. Every square inch of floor space was used up. They even slept in the luggage rack and curled around the toilet. That was quite a night.

At the dock in Phillippeville, was a large warehouse filled with American surplus. There were thousands of blankets, condensed milk cartons, shoes, clothing, tools, that had to be packed and made ready to be shipped to Italy where a new refugee camp was being established. The American that was in charge of the garage in our camp, was put in charge of the packing. He knew me from my garage days and asked me to be his assistant and interpreter. I speak some French. He would pick me up every morning at the gate, with his 3 ton truck. We drove a mile or so and stopped where a foot path came down from the hills. There about 20 Arabs would be waiting for us. They hopped in and off to the dock we went.

One evening a lady, she was Spanish, had missed the lorrie back to camp, and started walking. We picked her up. I gave up my seat in the cab for her and jumped in with the Arabs. They complained about being hungry. So I asked them why they did not drink some of the condensed milk they had with them. They said it was "Ramadam" and they would not eat until dark. I said, well there should be 3 stars out pretty soon. They could not believe their ears, how I knew, I never told them.

The condensed milk had to be turned once a week to be sure it was still good. Some cans turned bad and were leaking but the others in the same carton were good. I took some home to the camp, the rest went to the Arabs who certainly could use them. They were very poor. We had several thousand cartons of milk. The main job, however, was to fold the blankets, stack them 10 high, wrap them in waterproof paper, then sew them in burlap. Since the Arabs could not count to 10, I had a job on my hands. It was an interesting time for me. We had some funny experiences, however. I will recount only one.

My boss was very short and had contacted athletes foot on his rear end. It gave him a lot of trouble. He taught me a lot of American cuss words there. Because he had a hard time looking over the dashboard and because his rear end was so tender, he sat on a fat down pillow. One evening after an especially hot day, we were drenched in sweat. There is always a breeze at the dock and when we opened the doors, of the truck, the wind blew the contents of his pillow at him. Someone had split the pillow open, dumped the feathers on the seat, and taken the material. He looked like big bird. He taught me a whole new series of oaths then.

In early September, the camp was closed down and all but 40 were sent to Italy to another U.N.R.R.A. camp. The 40 that were left were sent to Algiers to wait for their USA Visa. Before we went to Algiers, though, we went to the Government house in Phillippeville to get papers. Since we had no papers whatsoever, 39 swore to the identity of the 40th. After we had gone through this ceremony 40 times, they issued us papers on which we could travel. We took the same Micheline train to Algiers. It was just as crowded and most uncomfortable since we could not use the toilet for the 24 hours we were in the train. You could not even get out of your compartment, there were so many bodies lying around.

When we arrived in Algiers, several Lorries were waiting for us. They had been in the sun so long that the metal platform was red hot. They had to water them down and then took us to our assigned quarters. We were assigned a room without windows in it at the back of a brothel. We refused and were taken to a small hotel in the old city. Everybody was taken to a different address. When we got into our room after several hours in the 100 degree sun, we sponged off, there was no bath or shower, and after spraying the bed with DDT, flopped on to it. It was so hot that we did not put anything on. The window was open and the breeze cooled us off. When we woke from a short snooze, we noticed that across the narrow street, 1/2 a dozen teenagers, boys and girls, were watching us hoping for some action. We had to close the window and get dressed which was a real hardship. After a couple of days, all 40 of us were housed in a very nice hotel and stayed there until we left Algiers. The folks were on the 5th floor, we were on the 8th, there was an elevator, but it did not work.

Each noon we would walk to the Mairie, which is the city hall, and were fed. The menu was always the same, all we could eat peel your own shrimp, french bread and wine. While there we received also some money once a week and provided our own breakfast and sandwiches at night. We enjoyed our stay. We did a lot of walking and sightseeing and swimming. One day somebody came back with a good looking sausage and distributed samples. It tasted real good and so I was dispatched to buy enough for everybody.

When I arrived at the place I noticed the sign "Boucherie Chevaline" which means "Horse Butcher", over the door. That was the end of that.

Oma and Opa and Jutta left Algiers about mid October. They were flown to Paris and from there went to Amsterdam. The plane was an old bomber with bomb bay doors that would not completely close. There were about 50 people on it and it went not higher than about 500 feet. According to Oma and Opa, it must have been a fun trip.

We went often to the casbah because we could buy food cheaper there. The streets were bordered by whitewashed walls with doors every 10 to 15 feet. Some led into beautifully landscaped courtyards. Others led just into rooms. In front of most of these doors hookers were trying to attract customers. Some in exotic clothing, some without anything on. When we told the folks about it, Opa wanted to go and see but Oma would not let him. Marga and I had to go along with him. Some doors had the sign, "Maison Honete", "Honorable House". I got a big kick out of it.

For the high holidays we went to a temporary temple especially for refugees. There were about 200 people attending. All went well until the reader held the sermon in Yiddish. None of us could understand a word but there was a lot of crying and a lot of "Oy Vey" s. We knew what he was talking about and cried along.

There were 37 of us left. All had lost his citizenship and therefore could not get a USA Visa until congress enacted a law goaded by Jewish organizations that exempted the 37. From this restriction and we were issued Visas. The only challenge left was transportation.

The war in Asia had by now also ended and all ships available carried troops home. Women were not allowed on these ships. When there was an opportunity for 3 women to get a ship, the couples broke up. At the same time the 3 men found an old freighter that would take them to the US. My friend Werner Simon was among them. However, their engine broke down and they were towed into Alexandria. It took 3 months to be repaired. All that time the Egyptian authorities did not only not let the men off the ship they would not let them communicate with shore. The men arrived in the US 3 months after they should have and had been given up for dead. Nobody knew where they were all that time!

Others, not married, left one by one until only 23 were left behind, including children. We spread out every morning all over town to find a ship and by the end of October, had located one that could take us all. It had brought supplies and went back empty. It was a Liberty Ship. The only problem was that it was moored at Bougie, about 700 miles

across the desert. The one hurdle left was to find a way to get to Bougie. We booked passage. They wanted \$100 per person. We went to "HIAS" that is the Hebrew immigrant Aid Society. They were willing to pay for us if my parents in Detroit would guarantee \$350 per person. We thought that was outrageous and declined. We then did the next best thing we sold the 2 \$10.00 gold pieces on the black market. We got \$125 for each and even had pocket money left over after we paid for the passage.

We then spread out again to find a way to Bougie. We had a meeting each night at 7:00pm to talk about what we had or had not found. One evening Marga did not show up. By 8:00 we were panicky. We knew she had gone into the native quarters and feared the worst. After a while she showed up with a grin from ear to ear. She had located a truck that was going to go back to Bougie after having delivered a load of vegetables. The problem was that he was leaving that same night around midnight and if we were ready he would take us. We were ready. We knew the trip would be 15 - 20 hours and needed to take water. We found 2 five gallon cans and were all set by midnight.

You have to use your own imagination to picture that trip. A rickety old flat bed truck, almost none existent roads, 120 degree heat, and nothing to protect us from the sun. The kids became mostly sick and cried most of the time, and some women fainted. We made one stop at an oasis but that didn't help much since we could not drink the water and our supply was gone. When we arrived, our heart sank. The empty ship was riding on top of the water at least 20 feet above the quay with a nailed together plank leading to the deck. No railing. The ships crew took our luggage aboard but we had to walk up that plank. With every move it swayed up and down. It was a lot of fun. We had to go one at a time so it took all afternoon to get us aboard. Marga and I were housed in the gunnery officers quarters. The war was over and the German crews had left the ships. It was comfortable, had two bunks, toilet and shower facilities down the corridor. We spent most of the days on deck sunning ourselves. Once we were on board, we were fed and went to bed. It had been a tough, hot day. At about midnight, they started up the engines and the vibrations made me seasick. The next morning we had breakfast just about the time we left the breakwater. Our elected leader "a dwarf" with two normal children came to the table and said, "You might not believe this but someone is already seasick." I confessed and got a round of applause. I was seasick all the 23 days it took us to get to Philadelphia.

Once we passed Gibraltar and got into the Atlantic, the weather changed. It was November, it was cold, and the waves were high. Just southwest of England we got into a fierce storm. The ship was riding high on the waves and was tossed

about like a ball. Every so often the screw would come out of the water with a terrible roar and a lot of vibration. We were advised to lie in our bunks so we would not hurt ourselves. The drawers under the bunks opened and closed by themselves with the movement of the ship. Then in the middle of the night the "to the lifeboats" bell rang. WE got dressed quick in all the clothes we had and went up on deck. There was no danger. Water had gotten into the circuit and shortened the bell out. By morning the storm had let up. The dining room was redecorated the walls and ceiling were splattered with ketchup and mustard. We learned that morning that another empty liberty ship not more than 200 miles from us had broken up in the storm and had sunk.

When we arrived in Philadelphia, my sister Ilse was at the dock side, and took us under her wing. We went to a hotel that night. We made a real splash in that elegant dining room. Marga had hand sewn a dress from an old bed sheet and also wore a man's overcoat cut down to her size and sandals. I wore a pair of torn khaki pants, a tweed jacket that was too small and had a rust stain on the back 12" round. I also wore a pair of light tan shoes. One sole was broken and made a cracking noise. The best I could say about our hair was raggedy. The waiters were reluctant to wait on us until Ilse explained the situation.

That evening we boarded a train and arrived in Detroit the day before Thanksgiving, 1945. The next day my parents gave a Thanksgiving dinner for all their friends. Mother had prepared a goose knowing how much I liked it. Again I spent most of that night sick in the bathroom.

There are two more stories I want to tell. After we had purchased our passage to the US we started thinking about a gift for my folks. We settled on 2 things, and proceeded to collect them. The first was sugar. WE heard that sugar was scarce in America so we collected sugar where we could. It was all brown sugar. Marga sewed by hand a small bag about 8 x 10 and we filled it with sugar. We had washed the material but it was still tattletale grey. And the handling of it and the trips we made with it did not enhance the look. When we gave it to mother she took one look and dropped it into the trash. We were heartbroken. We had denied ourselves sugar to bring it to her. In a few days we knew better. The other item we wanted to bring was a cactus. I knew that mother liked them. She always had them on the windowsill at home. We went to a park and carefully selected one. We had brought a small flowerpot and lovingly planted it. We did not know that it was against the law to dig up a cactus in a park and promptly we were arrested. At the police station we explained in our halting French that we didn't intend any harm but wanted to bring our mother a gift. The of course knew we were refugees and felt sorry

for us. They let us go and keep the cactus. I carried it in my hand all the way to Bougie in the vegetable truck and on the ship suspended it with string from the ceiling so it could swing freely. In the train to Detroit I put it in the glass holder in the bathroom. The train, however, arrived in Detroit an hour earlier than we had expected, We were still in bed when the station was called and in the rush to get dressed and get ready we left the train and forgot to take the cactus. When I remembered the train was on its way to Chicago.

The second story is more poignant. From the day that the Nazis invaded Holland, my parents had not heard from me. I tried to send Red Cross letters from Holland and tried to have some one in Switzerland send a telegram. I even gave them the \$5.00 bill I had received. Nothing. So when my telegram from North Africa arrived, they were puzzled by "all 5 are well". But I am getting ahead of myself. Isle's husband was in the Navy and was home very seldom. So Ilse asked my parents to move in with them. I did not know that and sent the wire to the address I had memorized. When they tried to deliver the telegram, the lady that lived there told the carrier that she did not know anybody by the name of Haas. So, it went back to the Post Office. When her husband came home that night she told him what happened, an overseas wire for Haas. It was February 1945. The war was still on. He remembered the people who lived there before them had some connection with the Michigan Chandelier Co. That is Isle's husbands firm. He called there and the operator knew the name and called mother. She in turn called the post office but was told they could not deliver the wire to her without clearance from the state department. They knew it was from overseas but could not figure out from whom. After many phone calls to the state department the wire was delivered. She called father who was with a customer of his at the time. When he heard that I was alive he collapsed. His heir had survived. This is the end of my story.

I tried to keep it on a light plain to make it interesting. There have been enough horror stories written, to satisfy anybodies need and I can verify that these stories are true. I taped this for my son. Both paragraphs are meant as background. I have seen enough horrors to believe. I concentrated on my own experience mainly because I think that is what you want. I placed a lot of emphasis on work because this is what kept me going and kept me sane. I was not able to portray the real horrors of these years, it would take a literary man to do that. I know though that you get the general drift of what went on. There must be some things hidden in my subconscious because every time I talk about these years I choke up. To give you an example of what I mean, for over 2 years I ate practically nothing but turnips. I mention turnips several times in my story

but every time when I want to talk about it or I want to write about it, I cannot remember the name, turnip. Gloria had to give me the name every time. Just as if my mind had blocked it out. There may be many, many more things that my mind has blocked out, I don't know. _

If you have any questions please feel free to ask them. I will be glad to tape a follow up.

MARGA

Your mother put some of her experiences on paper. It was not meant as a diary but rather an essay that could be published. She wrote it shortly after her arrival in the US. She hoped the American public would be interested in what we went through. She attempted to translate her story in to English from the original German but she never finished it. So I started again from the beginning. Her story is much more poignant than mine. She saw the happenings from a different angle. Here it is:

I

I am lying on my cot waiting for Eric. All is quiet. Most people are already asleep. Only a few children are still crying. It is 9:00 PM and at 5:00 AM I have to get up again. I am desperately trying not to think about being hungry and to forget that I have saved a slice of bread so I have something to eat for breakfast. I must concentrate on other things but what other things are there to concentrate on when you are hungry.

Then I thought about our arrival in Bergen-Belsen and our first day here. Our transport consisted of about 800 people, men, women and children. It was February and freezing cold. As our special train arrived at Celle, the nearest station to the camp, we were greeted by a contingent of SS and their German Shepherd dogs. Right away the screaming, pushing and verbal abuse started.

The five of us, my parents, my sister, my husband, Eric, and I tried to stay together. But an SS came and pushed Eric out of the line and yelled, "Go, go and help unload the baggage." Our baggage consisted of canvas satchels, blanket rolls and small wooden boxes. The four of us then had to climb into the back of a truck and were taken into camp.

The camp as it presented itself to us, is hard to describe; an icy road, unpaved of course, on both sides of the road, a large square fenced in with barbed wire containing wooden barracks in dire need of repair. From each square a clump of humanity stared at us inquisitively. It was obvious that each square contained a different category of prisoners. The prisoners in prison garb, civilians and people with yellow stars: Jews. Where are we going to be housed, we wondered.

On the road are groups of prisoners pushing wagons, carrying sacks, digging holes. All over them are SS screaming and pushing. We were speechless. But all we could hope for was

a closed in area to shield us from the bitter cold. But we hoped in vain.

We were arranged in rows of 5, and were counted and registered and moved back and forth. We stood there in the cold from 8:00 am to dark, no food, no drink. Mother was ashen. The tension of the last years, the 7 months already in camp, the lack of adequate nourishment had weakened her considerably. She was so cold and exhausted that she shook uncontrollably and could hardly keep herself erect. We supported her as much as possible, under these circumstances. Finally they told us where we were going to be housed.

Since we came from Camp Westerbork in Holland, where there was a Polio outbreak we were put into quarantine. Afterwards, we were moved into the Jewish compound that already held two earlier transports from Westerbork.

But first quarantine. A long barrack surrounded by barbed wire located next to our final camp ground. It used to be a horse stable. The partitions were still there. In each separation there were about 80 beds always 2 high. Beds...later on we called them coffins...was a wooden plank, with four narrow uprights and a straw pad. It was hard to find two beds together with all of the goings on. Mother and Jutta shared the lower bed, I clamored into the upper. The men went into the men's area. to find their beds. We were so exhausted, that we fell asleep at once.

I awoke at 7:00am the next morning. Mother was all flushed with fever and complained about difficulties in breathing, about nausea and about weakness. Really about everything. I found my thermometer, a valuable possession that I should have surrendered to the Germans. She had 102 temperature. I went to father's barracks to talk to him about it. He came over to see mother but did not know what to do either.

Outside, beyond our barbed wire fence, men were already at work heavily guarded by SS. Of course, we did not dare call to them. With our transport was a doctor who came to look at mother. He did not have any instruments but looked very serious and suggested to call the doctor who was responsible for the entire camp. But nobody bothered with our compound. Finally at 9:30am a SS came and announced that everybody had to go outside and stand in formation for the 10:00 appell. We stood almost 2 hours in deep snow to be counted. The children cried, they were so cold. The SS yelled and raved. During this appell we met the elder, who is in charge of our future camp. We told him about mother and he promised to send a doctor to look at her. We waited the whole day. The temperature stayed up and mother was totally apathetic. Finally the next morning the promised doctor came. He looked like a butcher with big fat hands and had a glass eye. He

examined mother but did not tell us anything about her state. After a while he said, "In the other camp we have a hospital. I will talk to the German authorities to arrange a transfer." When they picked her up in the afternoon, we were not allowed to go along. For two days we had no news about her, what so ever. Then someone sneaked us a piece of paper. She asked of us to come. She doubted that she could hang on 2 more days. She was the only patient. Like a dog they had thrown her on a cot in an unheated room. One window is broken and snow drifts into the room. It is ice cold in there. If she needs to go to the bathroom she had to walk 600 feet in the open air to the latrine. We felt desperate. We talked to the elder and to the SS. It was not possible to visit her. Under great danger we smuggled a thermos with hot soup through the barbed wire. Some people in our transport came directly from their home and had a lot more things and clothing. We lost it all in Vught. That's all we could do. After two days, another note from her. She was feeling somewhat better. The hot soup had helped her to warm up. Since yesterday, there was another patient in her room: A women from our transport who was in labor. Last night she had given birth to a little girl, lying on straw and by the light of a candle.

The next morning they lighted up a stove to heat up the barracks. We were more optimistic about her chances and sent more soup. But we were still not allowed to visit her. After 4 weeks the quarantine, was finally lifted. We were all moved into the camp where mother was and they put all of us to work.

II

Next to me Jutta stirs. It looks like she can't sleep either. For the last 3 months already we share a bed, a bed that is really too small for one person. We lie against each other. That saves room. I try to lie very quiet, maybe she will fall asleep. In these barracks there are 3 beds on top of one another. We live in the top one. It took a lot of effort to capture it, but we can at least sit upright in bed. For Jutta it is very inconvenient since she cannot climb down by herself. She has been sick now for several weeks and can't get out of bed anymore. She can hardly move.

In the morning before I go to work, at 5:00; I have to clean her up and give her something to eat. When I return at night, I have to clean the chamber pot. She has a lot of pain but never complains and I admire her for that. I am sure that it is no pleasure to be alone all day.

It is November, 1944. We have been in Bergen-Belsen now for 9 months. We cannot remember anymore what it is like not to be cold and hungry. Mother never has recuperated. She lies

in what is called a sick bay together with seriously ill people including cases of Typhus. She shares a bed with a lady who is handicapped. I do not have enough time to visit her daily, and to spend some time with her. In the mornings there is never enough time to get ready for work and to stand at appeal. At night, after we have marched back, and stood at appeal. Most days there are air raid warnings and we must be in our own barracks.

It is already 10:00 PM and Eric hasn't shown up yet. He works at the motor pool. It is heavy work from 5:00 am to late at night, but the five boys that work there sometimes get an extra piece of bread, and sometimes extra soup. That makes up for the long hours. I remember a little scene in one of the first weeks here. Sometimes we received boiled potatoes with our watery turnip soup, 3 per person. The really rotten ones were kept aside by the barracks elder. They were distributed after everyone had received his share. They were given away at the elders discretion. Eric was visiting with me. He nudged me and begged me to ask for a potato for him. I asked and was handed a potato. But I had a lump in my throat. It was the first time I noticed how hunger can change people. Now it doesn't bother us anymore. I now am delighted when I pass a barrel with the left overs for the pigs in it and I can retrieve a piece or two of turnip. When I think about it now, after the war, my stomach will turn.

I can't help thinking about the slice of bread I saved and know that like every other night, I will eat it. It is under my mattress, and I pull it out. After I have eaten it. The feeling of futility gets even stronger. I know that in the morning I have to go to work hungry and on an empty stomach.

I work in the prisoners supply room. Our main task is mending socks for the SS. But once a week the prisoners, POW's only, go to the showers and get clean underwear. Then we have to sort out and count the dirty laundry. The stuff is full of lice, of blood and fester. It is all crusted on. We are not allowed to talk to the prisoners but the laundry and their faces tell volumes.

Before that assignment I worked in the vegetable kitchen. A subterranean warehouse, damp and ice cold with mountains of turnips. Our SS sergeant there was short, fat, stupid, but jolly. He hailed from Bavaria, Sometimes he would stand in the door frame, his fists on his sides looking at us in deep thought. Then he would shake his head. "You don't all have black hair. I always thought you looked like Negroes. And now I find out it is not so at all." He clearly was disappointed.

We were sitting there 12 hours a day, cleaning and dicing turnips. Our hands had deep cuts, we were wet and cold, still it was a desirable job. Now and then we were able to sneak a piece of turnip, sometimes we could even hide a piece in our clothing.

At that time, father was still working, then he collapsed at work. Pneumonia, pleurisy and heavy colon bleeding. All of that because of being under nourished. On top of a weak heart. Two times already he was given up for dead but always rallied. He has a strong will to live. Now he lies in the old men's barracks. He gets up now and then and visits mother and Jutta. He has lost so much weight that he folds his pants twice around his waist and keeps them there with a piece of string. His face looks ashen and haggard. He supports himself with a stick. He was a hefty 50 year old when he left Amsterdam, now he is an old man. If I had not seen him deteriorate I would not recognize him at all.

Suddenly, Jutta sits up in bed next to me. If you can't sleep either, she says, let us play a game so the time will pass faster. Let's guess famous men. I think of a person, Jutta guesses. Is he contemporary? No. Did he live AD or BC? In the 19th Century? Yes. Is he a writer? No. Composer? Yes. We fall asleep.

Somebody tugs on my blanket. I had been dreaming about Chopin, and must reorient myself. Eric has finally arrived. It is 11:45. Jutta also wakes up. When he sees that he is here, she rolls herself in one corner. I move over and Eric pulls himself up. We whisper for about 10 minutes. It is the only time we have with each other. We haven't seen each other in weeks. The barracks do not have any lights besides it is strictly forbidden to use a candle or strike a match because of the constant air raids. After a short while Eric leaves to go to his own barracks. He has to get up again at 4:00 am. He has hardly left when I fall asleep again.

III

We are sitting in the prison supply room darning socks 12 hours a day for the last 4 months. It is relatively warm in there and we do clean work and we are rather glad. Against one wall of the room are 4 sewing machines. There men and women repair laundry and clothing, too torn to be redistributed. The women are mostly French, Jewish wives of French POW's. In one corner, shoes are being repaired. The shoemakers are mostly Albanians or Dutch. They repair wooden clogs that the POW's wear. There is one toilet, a real one with running water. In the camps of course are only latrines. We all have diarrhea, but there is no toilet paper. Therefore, we use small scraps of underwear. In the first place this is sabotage and also the toilets are always

stopped up. The sergeant who is in charge of the room, yells and threatens repercussions. I paint a sign in 3 languages and attach it to the toilet door, in German, Dutch and French, "Do not throw textiles into the toilet." The first day all went well, then the toilet is stopped up again. As punishment, we are not allowed to use the toilet for 8 days. However, we cannot leave the room from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm either. What that did to us having diarrhea and bladder infections is hard to describe.

The door opens and our sergeant storms in pushing his bicycle. It pours outside. He is sopping wet and in a foul mood. He calls one of the tailors over to him, a boy of about 20 years. My tire is flat, fix it. The boy had no idea what to do, and says so. The sergeant explodes. Who do you think you are to argue with me. You go and fix this tire, that's it. He expects the tire to be fixed when he returns. The boy tries to do his best but runs into unexpected trouble; the valve breaks. He has to tell the sergeant when he returns. The sergeant flies into a fit of rage when he finds out. He accuses the boy of having broken the valve on purpose and this is sabotage. He pulls out a truncheon and uses it on the boy. That night two men have to support the boy into camp. He had to be admitted into the hospital at once.

In the meantime, here we sit darning socks desperately trying to think of more pleasant things. We are trying to figure out into how many socks we have cut holes hoping that our beloved SS would suffer blisters on their feet while walking on the patches we made. Mrs. Winter, the oldest woman sitting at our table, constantly gives us recipes. It has become a ritual for all of us. It has become the most popular subject in camp. Even the men "cook" the most elaborate dishes in their imagination. Most of the time we patiently listen to Mrs. Winter's recipes but today we cannot hear it. The whole camp is being punished. Why? We don't really know. The only thing we know is that for 2 days now we did not receive our bread ration, our main sustenance. It is 11:00 am. For 2 days now we have had nothing to eat except our scoop of watery turnip soup. Our stomachs are cramping. We have headaches and are woozy. No, today we can't stand even the most luscious recipes. The worst part is that from the prisoners kitchen not far from us food odors waft through the windows. One woman gives a book review. We try to concentrate as much as possible to forget our troubles for the short while. Then the sergeant comes in again. While he is present we are not allowed to speak, so we sit in silence, thinking our own thoughts while darning socks. We probably all think the same thing. After he has left we play a different game. Just to divert ourselves we make poems. The first woman has to say two words then the next has to say two words that rhyme with the

first two words. With that to go on we all try to come up with a four liner. Somebody came up with this:

The gods do favor us no longer
It rains outside, we suffer hunger
And from the nearby kitchen swells
The most delicious dinner smells.

Like magic we always return to the same theme. In the evening, just as we enter our camp, a truck loaded with bread arrives. Children come running out of the barracks and yell to the returning parents, "bread, bread, bread is in the camp." I start to cry. Bread. Finally, bread. No one who is not starving and also has not eaten in 2 days can grasp the meaning of having an inch and a half thick slice of bread in your hands.

IV

It is Sunday afternoon, officially our free time. We hope they will leave us alone. Last week the sergeant in charge of keeping us occupied was in a bad mood. He made everybody line up and gave us a refresher course in marching. Men and women, old and young, lined up in a long column, five abreast, and marched. Right turn, left turn, about face, right turn, march. The sergeant beamed with pleasure. He knew he had taken from us the few precious hours we had to ourselves. Time to launder, to mend, to visit. "You Jordan Planchers! (roughly translates into SPLASHERS IN THE RIVER JORDAN) I will teach you what it means to march." That was last week. We hope they will allow us to have some free time this week. Eric and I have big plans. First we want to rest some then visit the parents. After that, even though there is already a chill in the air, we want to retreat to a pile of rubble that is in a remote corner. That rubble has been hospitable to us before. Here we want to make plans. Our favorite diversion. We have been married 2 1/2 years now. At this time we have been incarcerated 18 months. But we never gave up hope for a better future.

Last week, I was lucky, I was able to sell a few things. We called it selling when we were able to exchange a piece of clothing for something to eat. There were Greeks in our compound that had come to Bergen-Belsen directly from home. They still had cans of vegetables and condensed milk. And so, we were able to make deals. I sold a pull over sweater for two rations of bread; that is 3 inches of bread. If you divide it carefully, that is 3/4 inch for each of the five of us. We had saved our 2 inches for this occasion. It is 2:00pm and so far no trouble. Just as we try to take a short nap, it starts up; whistle blowing, name calling, and yelling. Before we can get ourselves together, SS storm

into the barracks and with beatings and kickings rush us to the appell grounds. Nothing urgent. The compound is to be enlarged. Parts of old barracks have arrived, they want 100 men to unload the wood and stack them. The sergeant walks slowly down the rows of people assembled and picks out the men he wants to use. Of course, Eric is among them. Bye, Bye, Sunday afternoon.

Looking through the barbed wire I can see the men work carrying parts of barracks and stacking them all in double time. Among them, SS that beat them with sticks and scream at them. Towards evening it starts to rain. Carefully, with effort, I succeed to throw Eric's coat over the fence. I put the extra slice of bread into the pocket. I return to my barracks.

It is all so awful. I cannot see the end. Everyday we see thousands of Allied planes, hear the bombardments of Hamburg and Hanover, and still the war goes on. In our camp the situation worsens. For 4000 people there are only about 50 spigots in the washroom/latrine combination. More and more people come down with Typhus. More of us are now sick and can no longer work. Add to that the lice infestation. We still fight the lice but it is a losing battle. There is no relief. It is hard not to despair.

V

Even with all we have to endure, we feel lucky that fate has put us in to Bergen-Belsen rather than sent us to Poland. When we left Amsterdam in a cattle car in June, '43, We did not dare to think that we would be that lucky. We had already seen the deportations for a year. We knew about the German methods and had heard lots of rumors about Poland and the gas chambers. We had no illusions. The rumors were confirmed in Bergen-Belsen.

In Amsterdam we lived the year dreading deportation. A year of fear and nervous excitement. We had escaped their dragnet 15 times. We hid in the attic and on the roof. For weeks we use our false IDs to hide out with Dutch friends. But too many people were discovered and sent directly to Poland. We did not want to take that risk. We rather wanted to stay as long as possible in Amsterdam. Officially we were roused from our beds three times and taken away but succeeded every time to bribe our way out or just run away. But in June 1943, our luck ran out. All of South Amsterdam was barricaded off. No streetcar was allowed through. The SS went door to door and took the Jews with them. Thus we arrived in Camp Westerbork in a cattle car. The trip in a closed cattle car was brutal. The sun burned down, there were too many people in the car, no air, no light, no water.

Westerbork, a camp for about 15,000 people is dirty and neglected but bearable. If there were only no Tuesdays. Every Tuesday a transport of about 1000 people would leave for Poland. It was forbidden to leave your barrack Monday night after 8:00 PM. At 3:00 AM the lists arrived from the SS headquarters and the names would be called. Whoever was called had to be ready to leave the barracks at 6:00 AM. The train that had arrived during the night would leave the camp at 11:00 am. Then the camp would settle back to the old routine. But the fear of these Monday nights was strong. The worst scenes happened that night, when children were separated from their parents, siblings were separated, friends were torn apart. Many volunteered to go along but even that was not allowed. Even suicide attempt did not help. A doctor would come at once and send you along, sick.

We were there 4 weeks when we received notice that we were all going to be transferred to concentration camp S'Hertogenbosh, near the city of Vught. We did not expect anything good to await us there. However, there were no gas chambers there, and it is located in Holland, not Poland. That is all we could hope for, under the circumstances. Jutta had to stay in Westerbork.

Within the concentration camp was a labor camp. Only working folks, no children were allowed. We were promised that Jutta would be safe in Westerbork and would not be sent through to Poland as long as her parents were in Vught. We had no choice. We had to accept their promises.

In Vught, men and women's camps were strictly separated. In the concentration camp part prisoners, male and female, hair shaved off, wearing striped clothing, they were mostly political prisoners, but there were also felons, murderers, thieves and con-men. The con-men were mostly kapos, I.E. supervisors. Each had a group of prisoners under them and could mistreat or beat them as they wished.

The labor camp was populated exclusively by Jews who were sent there for the purpose. Our arrival was typical. Men and women were separated. It went so fast we could not even say good-bye. The welcoming speech went as follows: "You pigs, do you have lice?" We had to place our packages on the appeal grounds. Everyone was allowed to keep one blanket a change of underwear, a shirt or a blouse, or a dress. The rest had to be abandoned.

The barracks were clean with little gardens in front. It looked to us like a mockery. Mother and I stuck together and tried to make life as pleasant as possible under the circumstances.

There were two places of work, the fur workroom and Phillips Electric. In the workroom, clothing for Germans were made. Also, flyer vests, greatcoats and military headgear. At the Phillips place there were the more expensive and indispensable machinery from the factory placed there in the hope these would be safe from Allied airraids inside a camp. They made radios and vacuum tubes. The workers there knew that they worked on important war material and sabotaged where they could. But German supervisors looked over our shoulders. We put in 12 hours a day.

Back in camp we had to prepare vegetables for a nearby cannery. A prescribed amount of burlap sacks full had to be done each night. We worked until 10:30 or 11:00 o'clock. There were 3 girls among us, 10, 11, and 12 years old. With a lot of effort and shielding they were able to stay but had to produce the same as adults. They marched out with us at 6:00 am each day deep rings under their eyes. When they got too tired we let them clandestinely sleep for an hour or so hidden under the work benches. When inspection came from Berlin, we hid them in the toilets so that no outsider would know that there were children in camp.

We were there about 10 days when we were suddenly called to appell. A column of SS went into our barracks. It dawned on us that the labor camp was being shut down and we were changed into prisoners. However, our work stayed the same. While the SS cleaned out our barracks we were reclothed. Everything we had on had to be turned in and we received a set of striped underwear, a striped dress and a striped scarf. Each dress had a yellow star and a prisoner number on it. We stood there until 12:00 am and saw all our belongings leave our barracks. There went our blankets, our dresses and our underwear. But we were too tired to really care. And this started my life as Prisoner # 014030. To be a prisoner meant to shut up and listen. To get up when an SS enters to be screamed at and to be beaten by one of the 17 women kapos. When we showered, always 2 under a sprayhead, an SS man came to watch. They got a big kick out of our embarrassment, but we had to shower. The worst part, however was the separation from our men. They too became prisoners the same way. You constantly worried about each other. All contact was strictly forbidden. Only now and then were we able to communicate at work where men and women worked in the same large barracks.

One thing was certain they had it even tougher than we did. They had to stand at appell for hours, march, do knee bends and roll in the sand. The Germans constantly thought up new ways to make life miserable. Woe to the one that collapses.

For us women, summertime was the worst. A special commando was formed to carry rocks. It was a real strain. 10 hours a day we had to carry the rocks from one place to the other,

senselessly in the heat of the day. SS with dogs made sure that we kept going. Women collapsed daily but that did not stop the work. I was lucky, i had a permanent job in the fur workroom and only once in a while had to help with the rocks.

The men had a similar commando. Pull up roots and carry sand. There, too, the SS had favored methods to make the work "enjoyable". There were camp limits, that no prisoner was allowed to cross. The commandos worked close by. A guard would tear off the cap of a prisoners head and throw it across the limit. "Go and retrieve it you dirty dog." Literally translated "pig dog" he ordered. When the prisoner went to get his cap, the guard raised his rifle and shot him dead. His report: "Shot while trying to escape." With all this going on , we were glad that Jutta was not here with us but we did worry about her.

The rumors were ever more disquieting. According to these rumors, Westerbork was going to be closed and everyone there sent to Poland. In the meantime, we had received, via Sweden, American protective papers, that entitled us to be interned as a family unit. The Germans were assembling people with such papers in order to exchange them for some German citizens in the US. The designated camp was Bergen-Belsen. and we imagined it to be entirely different. Several times we tried to be sent back to Westerbork on the strength of our papers but did not succeed. Finally, we made it. We had lost all hope. Since Vught was also partly closed down and most of our friend had been sent to Poland.

The 4 of us under the guard of two SS were returned to Westerbork. After almost 6 months of terror, Vught was over. As we arrived in Westerbork, the first transport to Bergen-Belsen left. Two weeks later the second transport left. The 5 of us left on the 3rd transport.

VI

It is January, 1945, in Bergen-Belsen. It is ice cold. The situation in camp is disconsolate. Hardly 1/3 of the inmates are still able to work. We all have typhus and starvation cankers. We are all hopelessly covered with lice. 15 - 20 people die daily. Nobody cares anymore if his bed buddy is cold in the morning. However, one searches for bread that might have been left behind. For the last 3 weeks we have slowly been relieved from our work especially the more agreeable ones. The work is now being done by prisoners from other camps, men and women. The outside commandos like tree cutting, remain. Our camp elders have been replaced by a prisoners who is a professional felon. He reigns with the help of kapos. They beat up our men

mercilessly. Daily some men come back from work with open wound on their heads and backs. Most die a few days later.

At 5:00 am kapos come in to our barracks and with truncheons, chase us out of bed. Woe him that is not quick enough about it. Nobody believes in an exchange anymore. It seems too far fetched. And still the unexpected happens. On January 18th, a Friday, 3 men from Berlin arrive. 300 people with American papers are called up. We are among them. It is hard for us to comprehend. I am so excited that I shake all over. Each one is questioned separately. As the first ones interrogated return to camp, we learn the details. The transport will leave Sunday, but only healthy people will go. I return to my mother. Can you walk, I ask. It is a questions of life and death. I will have to, she answered. I help her dress and then we practice walking. I manage to represent the whole family at the hearing. I am afraid to let them see my parents and Jutta. So far it is ok. Eric has been at work since 5:00 am and just now comes back. He too has had a hard time believing what is happening. All five of us huddle together afraid that it might not be true.

The next morning, more excitement. We all have to appear before the German military doctor. Since this time everyone must show up .We cover up the faces of my parents with scarves in order not to let the Germans see them. We are lucky that the doctor doesn't even look. He just counts us. Another 100 did not make it. For many the disappointment is too much. They don't live another week. Eric walks like he is in a trance. He does not dare to pack our meager belongings. He does not want to dare fate. We are all awake the whole night. We are too excited to sleep. On Sunday morning we are quarantined. I do not remember how we got my mother to the bath house. Once there she collapsed, throws up and looses consciousness. The three of us manage to get her into the truck and later on into the train. It was a Red Cross train, with second class cars. It seemed to finally come true. The guards suddenly are nice to us, the guards on the train are not SS anymore but regular army.

In the afternoon we get underway across Germany into Switzerland. We are traveling for 3 days. For three days and 3 nights, Eric and I stand in the gangway to give my mother room to lie down. She has high temperature again. Father has a hard time staying erect in his seat. Most people are not much better off. Almost everybody has used up their reserve strength just to make it into the train. Once under way, everyone collapses. The one thing that keeps us going is the hope for freedom. Some can no longer hang on. During the trip and later on in Switzerland, some do die. Like us, they longed for freedom but could not manage to live.

None of us will ever forget our reception in Switzerland. We had to spend the first night in the train but received bread and apples from the Red Cross. Also, hot chocolate. Chocolate and apples, we had forgotten that these things exist. We stayed 5 days in Switzerland. That gave us time to recover and get stronger. From there we went to Marseille, and on to North Africa to an "U.N.R.R.A." camp. Here we learned again to be human beings. Here we slowly recuperated in body and soul and learned again to take charge of our own lives.

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